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TO

THE MEMORY

OF

My Father

To Whom

I am indebted

For all ~~any~~ of my good qualities

&

For Everything.

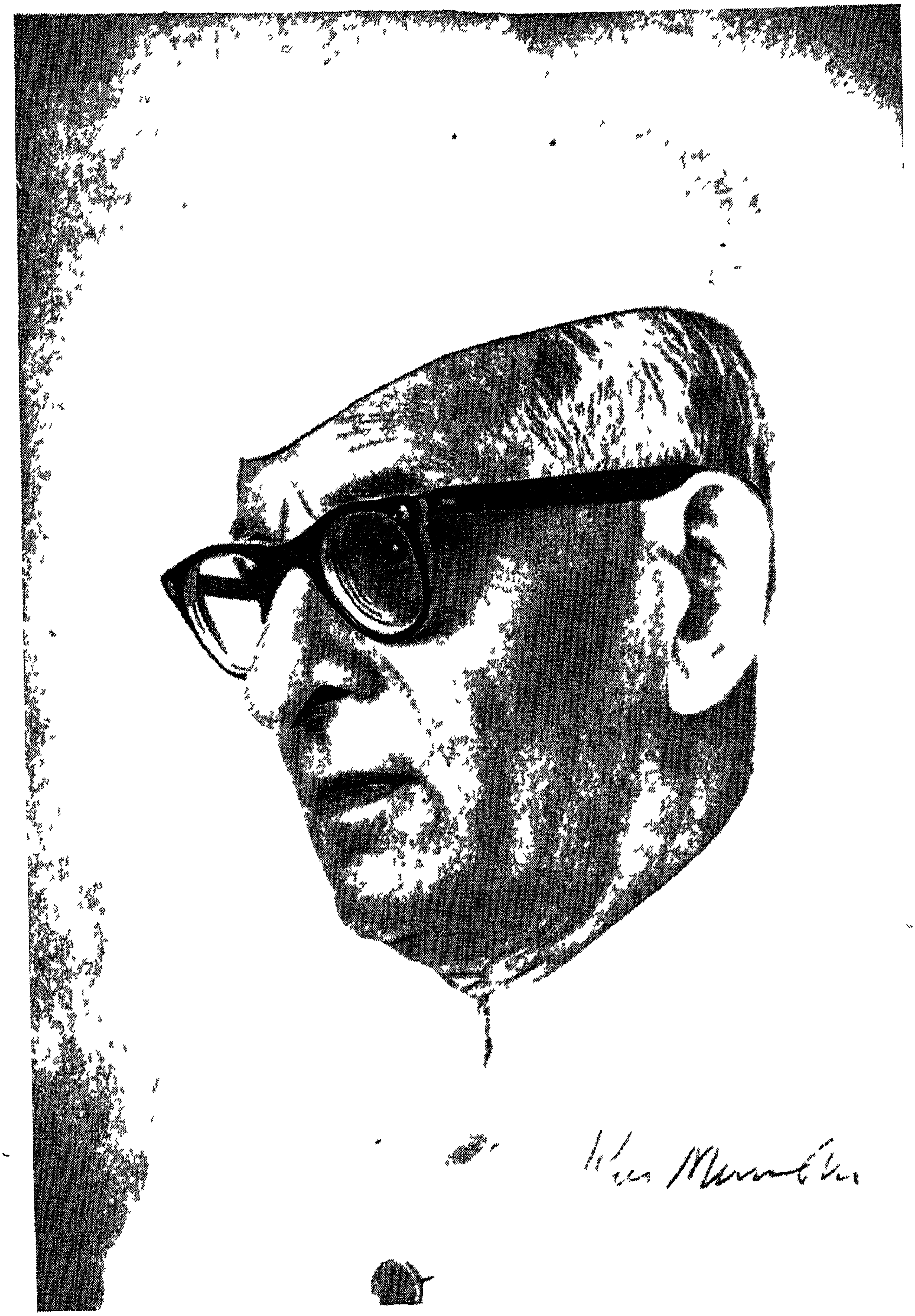
&

WHOM I LOVED & RESPECTED

THE

MOST

Title page of Munshi's Diary
The diary begins on January 1, 1897 This is the Dedication page added in 1903 after his father's death



Munshi at Seventy

MUNSHI

HIS ART AND WORK

Volume 1

PARTS

I. EARLY LIFE

II. AS A LAWYER

III. MUNSHIS IN LIFE & LITERATURE

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COMMEMORATION VOLUME

MUNSHI
His Art and Work

Volume 1

EDITORS

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A. K MAJUMDAR

SHRI MUNSHI SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY
CITIZENS' CELEBRATION COMMITTEE

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*Adapted from the *Kulapati's Letters*

PREFACE

We have great pleasure in bringing out this volume as a homage to Shri K. M. Munshi whose seventieth birthday was celebrated on December 30, 1956.

On the occasion of Shri Munshi's sixtieth birthday in 1946 some of his friends and admirers published a volume entitled "Munshi: His Art and Work". Since then Shri Munshi has filled various high offices and we felt that it should be brought up-to-date and brief accounts of his activities as the Agent-General of the Government of India at Hyderabad, the Food Minister of India and the Governor of Uttar Pradesh should be included in a survey of his life and work. A short narrative of his early life has been added so that the readers may appreciate the struggles he had to face in his youth. Some other chapters, such as Shri Munshi's place in Gujarati literature, and "Munshi and his message", have also been specially written for this edition.

To keep the price of the book within the reach of the average reader it has been decided to publish it in a cheap edition and divide it into four volumes. The first volume contains the story of Shri Munshi's early life, and his career as a lawyer, the second volume deals with his political activities, while the third and the fourth deal with his literary and cultural activities respectively. How far this compartmental treatment of Shri Munshi's biography is successful, it is for the readers to judge. We would only point out that his career has been so varied that it is difficult for any individual to describe it adequately though we hope some day and in the not too distant future a real biography of Shri Munshi will be written for the coming generations for whom his amazing career should serve as an inspiration.

All the contributors of this and the following volumes have known Shri Munshi more or less intimately By a happy chance they come from different states of India to pay him their heartfelt tribute And that is as it should be For, his most cherished ideal in life has been the concept of Mother India, one and indivisible To Her worship he has dedicated his life and in all his activities, in his writings, speeches, social and political work, the same motif appears as the incessant refrain *Vande Mataram*

Editors

INTRODUCTION

The hundred years from 1857 to 1957 constitute one of the most momentous epochs in the rich and varied annals of India's history This century saw the emergence of India from the slough of despond to the sunshine of Swaraj and partial self-fulfilment

Every political revolution is preceded by intellectual movement of cultural renaissance and social reform So it happened in India The new age of cultural renaissance was heralded by Raja Rammohan In 1857 the Great Revolt was suppressed ruthlessly and a disarmed dispirited, and disunited people stared bleakly at the future drained of all hopes

India had touched the very nadir of her degeneration Slowly, however, she, who had (in Dr Annie Besant's picturesque words) verily been the Crucified among the nations, awakened to life There was seen the amazing spectacle of a people growing into a nation, of communities coalescing into a people and of individuals merging into communities The national fight for regeneration began and after half a century and more of alternate advance and retreat, on August 15, 1947 India took her rightful place in the comity of nations The ten years since then have been years of consolidation The century saw not only the political emancipation of India but also a cultural and social renaissance Aptly therefore can this century be called the century of India's regeneration and renaissance

This has been a century of great events and great men A succession of illustrious personalities guided and moulded the process of national rebirth Besides these giants there was a galaxy of brilliant creative men who embodied in themselves the forces of the new renaissance

in one form or the other Shri K M Munshi belongs to this galaxy His life and work is typically illustrative of the working of these men, for he has the capacity to see, feel, study and react with a rare sensitiveness and amazing versatility to all that had been happening in the country since his childhood In his personality and achievements Munshi is a typical product of the Indian Renaissance, and through the prism of his life can be seen the century in all its richness and variegated light and shade

Writing on the occasion of the sixtieth birthday of Munshi, Prof D P Mukherjee piquantly analysed the traits of the ideal renaissance man and pointed out how Munshi is in that grand tradition'

> 'Every renaissance throws up an ideal type of man whose virtues and defects render him distinct equally from the average man and the type that is matured in decadence Beyond a vague sense of exhilaration, the average man betrays no symptom of being affected by the fuller life around him But the ideal type partakes intensely of it The whole or nothing is his motto All his nerves quiver in achieving He is seized by the daemon, and his frenzy is non-human because it is so completely vital On the other hand, he is unequal, inconsistent and partial His very activity will not allow him the rest in which values are nursed, ideas schematised into a system, and contemplation generates poise of the soul Being ever on the search, he does not reach the goal Having perpetually strained, he is not easy Life has touched him in the raw, and he cannot be mellow Ripeness is nothing to him because to him living is all, its start, course and the end.

> He cannot afford to exude flavour all the time as he is busy emitting glow His arc is never closed
>
> Munshi is in that grand tradition of the Renaissance man His literary activities, his participation in politics, his brilliance as administrator educationist, journalist and as an organiser of art-forms, dance-shows and dramas fail to close the list of his interests He is all that and more besides His energy spills out in abandon He is in the full stream of India in the making "

During the century following 1857, brilliant lawyers bestrode the legal and political world of India dwarfing their fellow-men Nanabhai Haridas and Jamshedji Kanga, Chimanlal Setalvad and Bhulabhai Desai, Rash Behari Ghosh and Lord Sinha, Pandit Sunderlal and Tej Bahadur Sapru, S Srinivasa Iyengar and Alladi Krishnaswamy Aiyar are names that will ever ring down the corridor of Time Munshi belongs to the last generation of this race of giants and is one of the most brilliant and prominent among the half a dozen living M C Setalvad, Attorney-General of India, and Munshi are both pupils of Bhulabhai Desai They were associated in intimate friendship and close comraderie with H J Kania who rose to be the first Chief Justice of free India Justice N H Bhagwati of the Supreme Court, M P Amin, Advocate-General of Bombay and Purushottam Tricumdas are among the brilliant lawyers who worked in Munshi's chamber at one time or the other There is scarcely any branch of law in which Munshi when in active practice had not been reckoned as one of the most sought-after and highly-prized lawyers in the country His forensic triumphs are scattered in the diverse law-reports of the country

The constitutional lawyer did not merely rest content with winning cases in the courts Munshi was instrumental in drawing up the Constitution of the Deccan States Union thus blazing the trail for the integration of the princely States which was so swiftly and successfully completed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel The contribution he made to the making of free India's Constitution will not be forgotten

Even while working in the Constituent Assembly, Munshi had the occasion to exercise his great diplomatic gifts as India's Agent-General to Hyderabad The hectic days of this brief office in which he faced great personal danger, his keen insight and correct appreciation of the problem, forms one of the most interesting and brilliant chapters of his life as well as the story of India's political integration under Sardar Patel

This century again saw the rise of the Congress, the political ferment following the partition of Bengal, the non-co-operation campaign, the successive Satyagraha movements and the emergence of free India In 1902 Munshi attended the XVIII Session of the Congress held at Ahmedabad under the Presidentship of Surendra Nath Bannerji In the same year, he pledged himself to fight for social reform, the adoption of a national language and the attainment of political independence In 1904 he came under the influence of Aurobindo Ghosh who had then emerged as the apostle of militant nationalism In 1907 at the fateful Surat Session of the Congress he was a volunteer in the extremists' camp of Lokamanya Tilak Munshi was one of the young politicians who worked with Dr Annie Besant in the Home Rule Movement He was associated with M A Jinnah till both left the Congress in 1920 From 1930 he worked under Gandhiji and in collaboration with the other great leaders of the Congress

He had the good fortune to be a close confidant of Sardar Patel

In the struggle for freedom and the subsequent consolidation of the country Munshi has played a vital role. He carried the message of the Home Rule agitation to the villages of Gujarat, was a member of the Bombay Legislative Council and the virtual leader of the Opposition, fought for the Bardoli Satyagraha, participated in the two Civil disobedience campaigns of 1930 and 1932 and underwent imprisonment, was the Home Minister of Bombay from 1937 to 1939, severed his connection with the Congress to pursue his ideal of United India from 1942-46; rejoined the Congress fold and worked for Constitution-making till 1950, was the Agent-General in Hyderabad in 1948, was Minister for Food and Agriculture in republican India's first cabinet from 1950-52 and has been the Governor of the largest state in India since 1952 In each of the activities which for the moment engrossed his attention he threw himself with thoroughness and intensity and left an indelible mark of his impressive personality

An orthodox Brahman child steeped in Puranic tradition, Munshi became an ardent admirer of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda, Mrs Besant, Ranade, Sri Aurobindo, Malaviyaji, and Gandhiji. Familar with the best in the west, his life-long mission has been to re-interpret Hinduism in the light of modern needs He began his career by defying social conventions, broke caste restrictions, fought for women's rights and was for a time Secretary of the Social Reform Association Yet he never supported or sponsored a movement which did not, in his view, bring out the best in Indian culture Throughout life he has tried to fathom the undying message of India and its culture,

trying to discover the very roots of fundamental values through social and historical studies

Early in life he became interested in education He found in it the creative art of life As Chairman of a Government-appointed committee he framed a scheme for physical education in Bombay, helped in re-orienting secondary education, was a very active member of the Bombay University, planned the University of Baroda and joined in planning that of Gujarat, organised, established or conducted educational institutions of several kinds ranging from a home for delinquent children to the Institute of Agriculture at Anand, including colleges, hostels, schools, as Food Minister organised the Indian Council of Agricultural Research as a super-University of Agricultural research, as Chancellor of the U P Universities, re-organised and stabilised some of them

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan which Munshi has built up step by step is a living embodiment of his mission It is something more than a mere educational and cultural institution, with an international reputation It is a movement embodying the mission and the message of Indian culture and Bharatiya Shiksha Verily can Munshiji as the Kulapati of the Bhavan lay the flattering unction to his soul that his dreams of Indian culture have taken some concrete shape through the activities of this institution

Many of the great leaders of the Indian renaissance have been journalists No wonder too, for they had to carry their message to the millions Surendranath Banerji and Aurobindo Ghosh, Lala Lajpat Rai and Maulana Muhammad Ali, and last but not least, Gandhiji were associated with the Fourth Estate Munshi has been a working journalist or as the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Federation of Working Journalists hailed him at Lucknow "a hard-working journalist" Even to-day his

Kulapati's Letters constitute the main attraction of the *Bhavan's Journal* which reaches over 30,000 subscribers besides being published in a number of newspapers and magazines throughout the country

Gujarat was Munshi's first love In fact, he built up the idea of Gujarat as a cultural unit In the first article he wrote in 1907, as a student, he shed tears over the vanished glories of Gujarat, in 1910, he wrote about the conquest of Somnath, in 1910, he coined the word *Gujarat-ni-asmita* —'Gujarat-consciousness', through his literary labours and through organisations, founded or controlled by him, he made Gujarat-consciousness a living factor He enriched its literature and by his works of fiction and history gave it a background and a sense of continuity He indeed made a great contribution towards unifying Gujarat as an entity It is indeed a fulfilment of the dream which Sardar Vallabhbhai had cherished and for which Munshi had all along worked

As a member of the Dar Commission, he stood forth as a champion of national unity, and solidarity and opposed linguism as a disruptive force His memorandum to the Commission, later published as the *Linguistic Provinces and the Future of Bombay* has become a classic on the subject

The Nav Gujarat campus at Andheri in Bombay and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the Institute of Agriculture at Anand and the five colleges of the Charutar Vidya Mandal which are components of the Sardar Patel University, Anand—of every one of which he is either the President or the most active of the Trustees—are but sign-posts of a tremendous life-long effort to build Gujarat

He had enriched Gujarati literature and contributed to the growth of Indian literature as a whole as few have done His novels, plays, history, essays, speeches and bio-

graphies as also autobiographies—all form a brilliant chapter of Indian literary renaissance

Starting under the inspiring influence of Bankim Chandra, he has written both in Gujarati and in English in a manner which has won for him a high place in literature A large part of his productions has, no doubt, a contemporary value They are the products of a vigorous imagination and an unconventional creative boldness The numerous pictures that he has presented through literature are invariably romantic and are always impressive In many of them, a breathless intensity pervades the scene. The story-telling is full of interest and surprise, never feeble, never boring There are few writers who can outdo Munshi as a *raconteur* with the power to elevate a trivial incident into a thing of breathless interest

To any reader, with an unbiassed mind, Munshi's *Gujarat-no-Nath, Prithvi Vallabh* and *Jaya Somnath* will stand out among the best works of the century The three volumes of his autobiography are a unique product of the Indian renaissance written with a rare frankness and objectivity

In all aspects of his life and work, Munshi has the true Brahmanical attitude, to see life as a whole from its roots in the Vedas to the latest Kumbha Mela at Allahabad, to discover in the continuous process of existence a universal transformation from matter to the Spirit, to find in the transmutation of the lower instincts into the fundamental aspirations—Power, Light, Love, Beauty and Joy—which he considers emanations of the Spirit, the way to lead the fuller life

From the mystic and philosophic points of view, Munshi's approach is too firmly planted on earth But the usefulness lies in truths being brought down like the Ganga from inaccessible heights to the daily affairs of life

by a man who is of the earth, earthy, and who does not shut his eyes to the stark realities of life

Munshi's attitude is always one of self-confidence, born out of unshakable faith in the cause he pursued. But that was the typical attitude of the century in India It was this century which brought the eternal truths of the *Gita* to the daily affairs of life, which converted the Mother Kali into the Motherland, tried to raise the sordid life above vulgarity and triviality by force of idealisation

But apart from what Munshi writes or stands for, he is a typical child of the century His all-devouring energy, as Diwan Bahadur K M Jhaveri, the doyen of Gujarati literature, once said, is matched only by the multiplicity of his interests

Munshi has been associated with more movements than many of the giants of the century, though he worked in close co-operation with several of them He admired several of them, accepted some of the leaders, was the colleague of some and yet remained a non-conformist, a law unto himself He has written and spoken on many problems during the last 45 years and, with a rare frankness He has preserved his varying moods and reactions in what he calls his 'Diary Notes' and has published some of them, which disclose the real man.

Munshi's life and temperament present the typical life of the century high Brahmanical pride in India's past, distrust for the decadent social institutions, respect for parents devoted to each other He suffered from maladjustments of an early marriage and struggled to rise from poverty and obscurity to fame and wealth He came across love by accident and staked all in the fashion of a romantic poet of life to carry it to a triumph He has enriched domestic life by a rare passion and devotion, in Lilavati Munshi he has found a partner who shares his

life's visions and is active in the spirit of the 'Undivided Soul' of which Munshi has written in several of his works All the time he had struggled with resisting forces, facing trials, failures and triumphs as few of his contemporaries faced His richness of life at seventy is associated with almost juvenile buoyancy.

He has an irrepressible love of life—*Jivan-no-ullas*—an exuberant joy of life He is equally fond of Rabelaisian stories as of revelling in the ethereal beauties of Kalidaas, Goethe and Shelly

As we see from his works, he shows a rare sensitiveness the throbbing pulsation of life from the sensuous to the ethereal He has put forth persistent effort for self-discipline, and is wedded to high idealism though firm-rooted in realism Self-confidence which sometimes appears fool-hardiness, a love of success and a worship of power co-existing with humility and unshakable faith in God, worldliness associated with a yearning for paranormal experiences, a keen sense of history which makes him look upon the life of his time as a step in the final evolution of life, at the same time, an undying urge to see pristine glory restored through many sided efforts through writing the *Epic of the Ancients* through concrete steps like the rebuilding of the Somnath Temple the redemption of Dehotsarga and the planting of beautiful forest girdle of Giri Govardhan, by restoring the ancient forests by *Vana Mahotsava* and rescuing the breed of cow, 'Mother of Plenty' as he calls her His knack of investing the humdrum affairs of life with the glow of romance is unparalleled He can write on the Gospel of the Dirty Hand and invoke the *Taittiriya Upanishad* he can organise a School or a College, a desert-nursery or a *gosadan* with a Puranic phrase While fighting ugliness, he can dream of love and beauty If he visits Badrinath,

he invests it with the colour of romance and devotion as in the spacious days of yore

He can write a Memorandum on the City of Bombay fighting linguism and discant on the eternal verities He can pursue the mysteries of astrology and paranormal phenomenon At the same time, he can obey the mandate given to him from above or pursue the path of surrender unto God He can write the most heart-rending tragedy and a ribald farce with equal creative power.

Munshi's fondness for music, drama and dance expressed itself into giving them a place not only in his own life but in the life of others, and associated with Shrimati Munshi it blossomed in their directing plays, dances and dramas, ultimately flowering in the Kala Kendra of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Munshi has composed dance dramas and plays, directed their performances, written scenarios and sometimes gone to the studio for helping the editing of the films With his keen sense of the dramatic he can originate a play or correct it or improve the script or find a faulty footstep in the dance

Munshi may not have reached the Everest of any of the spheres he worked in But his varied tastes and versatile interests embrace almost the whole of life and culture He has lived and lives a life of ceaseless work enriched by the beauty and joy of the moment These are achievements scarcely attained by any of the giants of the country

Strong by temperament, he has an infinite capacity for love and affection, he has equally great ability to attract them from others Yet he is a ruthless taskmaster, sensitive to disloyalty and yet rarely going out of his way to hurt others He has been loyal to the leaders whom he accepted, though never so as to reduce himself to a camp-follower He has been, above all, a man true to himself

and his temperament, a man who has given the best in him to the country and to its culture If he had attained the triumph in one of the fields only, he would have been considered outstanding, if not great That is the measure of his strength, of conflicts, urges and aspirations, failures and triumphs He has faith in himself and in God in dealing with whatever comes to him

Munshi's idealism and energy attracted Gandhiji His yogic urge evoked a paternal response from Aurobindo His practical sense and capacity drew to him men of such divergent perception as Sardar Patel, Pandit Nehru and Rajaji

The unremitting toil of such a dynamic personality in different walks of life and in diverse spheres of activity challenges attention and deserves to be written down for the benefit of contemporary students and posterity alike No apology therefore is needed for the publication of this book dealing with the life, work and art of Munshi in detail on the occasion when a Committee of his friends and admirers are celebrating his seventieth birthday

PART I

THE FIRST FORTY YEARS

MUNSHIS OF BROACH

IN 1860 the two Munshi families of the Bhargava caste of Broach were united when Maneklal married Tapibehn Their son Kanhaiyalal Munshi naturally claims that he is *the* Munshi of Broach from both sides

Broach is a small town in southern Gujarat, in ancient days it was the chief port of Western India The Greeks called it Barygaza and the Indians Bhrigukachchha or Bharukaccha

According to the Puranas, the sage Bhrigu practised austerities for one thousand years at Dasasvamedha, a sacred spot in Broach, and, in consequence, it became a place of pilgrimage under the name of Bhrigutirtha or Bhrigukachchha The descendants of Bhrigu were known as the Bhargavas, among them was the learned sage Jamadagni Once Kartyaviryya, king of Anupa Desha (sometimes identified with Gujarat) raided Jamadagni's hermitage and carried away his cows This raid infuriated Parasurama, the son of Jamadagni, the most valiant among the Aryans, who appears from the *Mahabharata* to be the master of the art of war and was accepted as the incarnation of Vishnu Parasurama killed Kartyaviryya The latter's son retaliated by killing Jamadagni In irresistible wrath, Parasurama destroyed the Kshatriyas in twenty-one campaigns in succession Later, he settled in Surparaka, now Sopara near Bombay All the Bhargava Brahmins in the west, in fact all Brahmins from Cambay to Cape Comorin, claim descent from Parasurama.

Though the history of the Bhargavas for a few millennia after the Mahabharata War is rather obscure, the

Bhargavas, with this tradition to support them, claim to have lived in Broach for thousands of years Sri Dhanprasad Munshi, Munshi's cousin, after diligent research, has been able to trace the early ancestors of the Munshis back to Visvambhardas Desai, who, according to the family tradition, helped Sultan Muhammad Tughluq to suppress a rebellion in Gujarat It appears that Visvambhardas received a jagir as a reward for this service

In the 18th century, one Nandlal, a Bhargava Brahmin from Broach and a Persian poet and scholar, served in the Secretariat of the Mughal Emperor Emperor Muhammad Shah, who was very fond of poetry, was pleased with Nandlal's poems and, when the latter retired, granted him in perpetuity the Munshigiri of the Broach pargana at the rate of one rupee per village This Munshigiri brought a total income of Rs 150 per annum which is enjoyed by Munshi's family

Nandlal was a *munshi* by profession and was a Munshi by an imperial grant His son Harivallabh rose to become the head of the Secretariat of the Nawab of Broach He married his only daughter by his first marriage, to Kishordas, a descendant of Visvambhardas Desai Having no prospect of getting a son he also gave to Kishordas the gift of the Munshigiri Maneklal, father of Munshi, was the sixth in descent from Kishordas Later, however, Harivallabh married again and had a son from whom Tapibehn was descended

In the latter part of the 18th century Gujarat became a playground of rival armies, first of the Mughals, then of the Maratha powers fighting among themselves, then of the Marathas and the British Kishordas and his son Jugaldas, in addition to being Persian scholars, were rent-farmers and were also styled Desai

After the British conquered Broach from the Nawab

of Broach in 1803, Jugaldas, the then head of the Munshi clan (by this is here meant the line of Kishordas Munshi in the male line) was useful to the British

His son, Kishandas, founded the fortunes of the family in the early years of the 19th century It was Kishandas who acquired the plots on the 'mound' or 'knoll', (which Munshi has made famous by naming it 'Munshi Heights') and built the family mansions To the Bhargavas everything about the 'Heights' was wonderful Anyone who drank the water of its wells became brave to the point of being reckless Even tobacco soaked in its water gave a better taste The importance which the Munshis acquired was perhaps due to their headstrong temper, ready wit and sharp tongue, to which should be added their aptitude for law The law court was the pole-star of their lives No wonder the people of Broach paid them respect, that was their due

In 1806 Kishandas became the Persian writer of the Broach Court Eight years later he took his lawyer's *sanad* and began to practise In 1817 he was a Government Pleader in the court at Surat In 1831 he was appointed to the office of Civil Judge, then called 'Principal Sadar Amin', a prize post in India in those days According to Sir John Romer, then Chief Justice of the Sadar Dewani Adalat (High Court) of Bombay, Kishandas 'was an excellent and most useful public servant'

Kishandas was a successful man He made money, built a mansion on the 'Heights', acquired agricultural lands and was honoured by everyone in the caste and the town, and even by British officials He died at Thana on July 27, 1832

Of the three sons of Kishandas, Kashiram, the eldest, was a picturesque personality, and his life has been vividly described by Munshi Anupram, well known for his

honesty, integrity and efficiency, was the Native Assistant to the Resident of Baroda He successfully conducted the affairs of the East India Company in their dispute with the Gaekwad regarding the Rewa Kantha District The grateful Company was thinking of conferring on him a jagir when he suddenly died on September 18, 1841, alleged to have been poisoned by the men of the Gaekwad His widow and sons received a small pension from the Company

Narbheram, the youngest of Kishandas's sons, was born in 1819 He was only thirteen when his father died Even as a young man he was known for his obstinacy and quick temper At the age of eighteen he joined the Broach Bar and later unsuccessfully applied for the post of the Native Assistant to the Resident of Baroda, which fell vacant on the untimely death of his brother In 1846, however, he was appointed the Reader in the Broach Court, and the Additional Judge, Burdon, wrote about him "Very clever and talented man Bears a high character amongst the inhabitants of the city" In 1850 he was appointed the Sheristadar of the District Court at Surat which had jurisdiction over Broach

The District Judge at Surat was Andrews, who, at one time, was the Resident of Baroda Narbheram's fidelity to his superior officer led him to participate in what is known as the Baroda Khatput Case, which has been humorously described by his grandson

When Andrews was the British Resident of Baroda, a violent dispute broke out between two widows of the Nagarsheth regarding succession to their husband's property The younger widow, Joita Shethani, claimed to have a posthumous child Its legitimacy was challenged by the elder widow As a result, Joita Shethani and her son were imprisoned The prison guards killed the child

but the Shethani escaped to Bombay where she sought the protection of the East India Company In the meantime Andrews was transferred to Surat as the District Judge and was succeeded by Captain Outram, later General Outram of the Mutiny fame

The case of Joita Shethani was sent for disposal to Captain Outram A preliminary investigation revealed to him that Joita's co-widow had bribed both Andrews and his Indian mistress Dulhin Self-righteous military man that he was, Outram wrote to Andrews on August 31, 1850, enquiring whether he had taken the bribe Andrews, a trained lawyer, provoked the aggressively honest Outram by taking him to task for coming to a conclusion without sufficient proof Outram retorted "I am not an Old Bailey attorney, I am a British Officer"

However, on September 28, Narbheram came to Baroda on behalf of Andrews to inspect the incriminating documents Outram permitted him to do so in the presence of the Native Assistant and the Kotwal of the Gaekwad who happened to be a relative of Narbheram, but hostile They reported to Outram that Narbheram was not merely inspecting documents, but was also destroying evidence Outram was outraged Narbheram escaped arrest by a timely flight from Baroda Correspondence ensued between Outram and Andrews in the course of which Outram wrote in the following vein

> "Narbheram, he was a wily native He started taking copies of papers not relevant to the case, he engaged persons to spy on my Native Assistant He also went about telling people that I was a mere soldier, that I did not understand my business, that I was likely to be transferred, that if a civilian officer came in my place, all the opponents of Andrews would be punished And this native went

> further, he alleged that I—Outram—had been won over by cheats and that a committee had already been appointed to inquire into my conduct This wicked Sheristadar of yours even insulted me and the Gaekwad ''

The whole matter went up to the Governor of Bombay who censured Outram for having behaved foolishly and Andrews for having sent his Sheristadar to Baroda, the Governor also censured the conduct of Narbheram The matter did not rest here Outram resigned The Directors of the East India Company, to whom the case went on appeal, took a different view Andrews died in the meantime and so no inquiry was made into his conduct Outram was reprimanded for his foolishness, but was promised employment as soon as a vacancy occurred Narbheram's further promotion was stopped

It was now Narbheram's turn to be outraged In great indignation he resigned his post, returned to Broach, and resumed the overlordship of the Munshi Heights He was then only 32 There is a family tradition that in 1856, Nana Saheb, disguised as a Sadhu, came for a subscription to Narbheram, who gave five thousand rupees as a contribution towards the coming revolt Of course, this was kept a closely guarded family secret, for the 'wretched Outram' and a few more 'mere soldiers' like him had suppressed the revolt!

For the rest of his life Narbheram lived like a grand seigneur He commanded the respect and admiration of his townfolk, and it was on his aid and knowledge of English that the pious citizens of Broach relied when a young British Collector decided to shift the Dasasvamedha cremation ground Narbheram appeared before the Collector with his usual composure and authoritative air and declared "The site is sacred, you cannot change it.

Ages ago the demon Bali performed the ten-horse-sacrifice here to win the rulership of the Gods Here it was that God, as the Divine Dwarf, pressed him down to the nether world Since then the spot is the gateway to heaven How then can you change it?" The young Briton was suitably impressed and gave up his sacrilegious intent

This champion of Hinduism, however, had rather a catholic taste in other directions He had a Muslim mistress His devoted wife suffered this lapse, with the patience of a Hindu wife When Narbheram fell mortally ill, she went like a true *Sati,* to the family deity, Mahadeva, and prayed to be taken away before her husband Her wishes were fulfilled, she suddenly fell ill and died A few days later Narbheram followed her At that time Maneklal, Munshi's father, was sixteen years old

2

MANEKLAL AND TAPIBEHN

MUNSHI'S mother, born in 1855, was the daughter of Chimanlal Munshi, a member of the other Munshi clan which was descended from Nandlal Munshi Her mother died when she was only 4½ months old Soon after, her father married again

In 1897 Tapibehn wrote her memoirs with a view to unburdening her anguished heart, in them, she referred to herself in the third person Of her childhood she wrote

> "Tapi was two years old Her wet-nurse was dismissed, as she had learned to eat She could walk a little, talk a little She would stammer a few words and Rupabai, her grandmother, would start crying

for her daughter Tapi then asked 'Mother, why are you crying?' The old one replied 'Wretched girl, you have killed my daughter by your birth' But Tapi did not yet understand what the old woman meant ''

Tapi's grandmother was very poor and carried on a heroic struggle to maintain a genteel appearance When Tapi was six years old Rupabai became anxious for her marriage In those days when a commercial civilization had not made money the badge of respectability, Rupabai had no hesitation in suggesting to Narbheram Munshi, the aristocrat of the 'Munshi Heights', that her granddaughter be married to his third son, Maneklal Opposition, however, came from Dayakunvar, wife of Narbheram She objected to having a daughter-in-law who had no mother, for, she said, she had with so many sons and daughters, enough burden of her own Narbheram overruled the objection; the horoscopes tallied, and the betrothal took place When Maneklal was nine years old his marriage was celebrated with the customary ceremonies and festivities He rode out to Chimanlal Munshi's house, married Tapibehn and brought her back in a palanquin Shortly after, her maternal grandmother, Rupabai, died, and Tapibehn came to live with Rukmini, her cousin, as her father was in service outside Broach An old aunt who loved Tapi died also shortly after, and the sensitive child felt acutely the indignity of her position, as Rukmini made her life extremely difficult However, she suffered patiently and meekly with an unshakable faith in God Whenever Rukmini's tyranny over her became unbearable she prayed to God to come to her aid But, as she naively writes in her memoirs, ''He did not answer her prayers ''

At the age of 12 Tapibehn came to live with her husband's family on the Munshi Heights The only posses-

sions she brought with her were a few *saris* and *cholis* packed in a trunk In the meantime, Maneklal had to go away to Ahmedabad, as there were no adequate facilities in Broach to prepare him for the Matriculation Examination The husband and wife, 15 and 12 years old respectively, first saw each other at close quarters on the railway station Tapibehn describes this meeting in her memoirs thus

> "In the bright half of Jyeshtha, Maneklal—the husband of Tapi—was travelling in the same train in which Tapi, her step-mother and the latter's two sons were going to Godhra Therefore, it came about that Tapi and Mankelal exchanged glances They both felt happy This was evident, because each was shyly looking at the other ever so often At the Godhra station, Tapi and her companions got down but she went on exchanging glances till the train left "

The climate of Ahmedabad did not suit Maneklal, so he returned to Broach Shortly after Narbheram Munshi fell ill and Maneklal gave up his studies to nurse his father. When Narbheram and Dayakunvar fell ill, the management of the Munshi household fell on the shoulders of Rukhiba, the widowed daughter of Narbheram, whose temper has been picturesquely described by Munshi in his *Kulapati's Letters* Tapibehn was thus placed at the mercy of two heartless women, Rukmini in her father's, and Rukhiba at her father-in-law's, house

According to the custom then prevailing among respectable families in Gujarat, Tapibehn had to go to her father's house for her evening meal and return at night to her husband But when Tapi went to her father's house, her cousin, Rukmini, tortured her with cruel taunts So Tapibehn went ostensibly to her father's house to take the evening meal so that her father's respectability might be

maintained with her husband's relations In order to escape the cruel taunts of Rukmini, she did not take any food there but returned at night to her husband, forgoing her evening meal The prestige of her father would have suffered if it had been found out that she did not get her dinner at his house This went on for months

One day Rukmini was more than usually violent Tapibehn's going hungry every night was also telling upon her mind She confessed her plight to Maneklal's sister who informed her brother Maneklal gently coaxed the whole story out of Tapibehn, gave her what little food he could get at that hour of the night and said "You must not hide anything from me, you have no mother or sister, so I shall fill their places, and you must have the same confidence in me" The next morning Maneklal's mother learnt of the affair and ordered Tapi to dine with her instead of going to Rukmini

Soon after, Maneklal's parents died and Tapibehn came under the iron rule of Rukhiba But happier days were ahead Maneklal got employment in the Sub-Registrar's office at Godhra on a salary of Rs 12 and later was transferrred to Ahmedabad on a salary of Rs 15 per month Shortly after, a daughter was born to them Promotion followed Two more daughters were born, but the third died soon after birth

Early in 1887 Maneklal and Tapibehn left their unhappy days behind them Tapibehn went to Godhra where her husband was posted, and she felt extremely happy This is how she records the impressions of the day

> "On the fifth day of the dark fornight, Tapi went to Godhra The train reached there at seven, because at that time there was a direct train to Godhra When she reached home at eight, dinner was

ready The two of them dined and talked affectionately, never was a moment happier nor so peaceful

> "The fortune of the couple was at its height, from a small job he had gradually been promoted till he had become an important official, two daughters had been married, the third was seven years old; God's blessings were on them, they did not owe a single anna to anyone"

A few months passed and Tapibehn exultantly wrote

> "Tapi had always trodden the path of religion with faith in the Lord, and in return the Lord has today bestowed on her the fruits of religion and virtue That He should be pleased with her devotion is not surprising For, day and night she has prayed, 'My God! my husband is performing his duty, he is providing for his wife and protecting her It is the duty of a wife to be virtuous and serve her husband But only if she gives birth to a son, can the husband be free from the obligation to his ancestors By the grace of God, I am doing everything, still I have not been able to present a son to my husband So there must be something wrong in me' Now even that difficulty is no more What more do I want now? I thanked God again and again"

A son was born to her on December 30, 1887 Tapibehn was beside herself with joy She writes "Poets have described the joy of Yashoda as she saw the frolics of young Sri Krishna, I too felt like her, as I watched my son" He was named Kanhaiyalal The boy brought luck; Maneklal Munshi became the Mamlatdar of Mandvi, a few days after the birth of his son

Tapibehn was now keen that the family properties should be partitioned so that her son might not be depriv-

ed of his share The demand for partition by Maneklal opened the flood-gates of family feuds and recriminations Pharsram, the eldest brother, said referring to Munshi "The first danger is Yama (King of death), the second is the brother, the third his brother's son" Rukhiba was unrestrained in her abuse of Tapibehn Unfortunately, Tapibehn was not capable of retorting A partition suit was instituted by Maneklal It was referred for arbitration and after endless quarrels and fierce recriminations the family properties came to be partitioned

Maneklal and Tapibehn had their due share of misfortune Two of their daughters became widowed in their teens, Tapibehn had therefore to live at Broach to look after them Munshi generally stayed with his father wherever he happened to be posted He liked to live with his father for he loved him ardently, though he was slightly afraid of him As he grew older, he invested his father in his imagination with the attributes of a semi-divine being This respect had a wholesome effect on the boy For Maneklal was a deeply religious man, simple, direct and honest In those days, and perhaps even in these, illegal gratification came easily to revenue officers to swell their private fortunes Yet Maneklal's honesty became proverbial He was very hard-working, loyal and fearless This brought him recognition and rapid promotion

The character of the man is illustrated when, as Diwan of Sachin, a small native state in Bombay, he had to deal with a mentally defective Nawab The Nawab had sworn to destroy the Diwan On Id Day, the Diwan was expected to garland the Nawab as the procession passed on its way in front of his house It was rumoured in the town that when Maneklal would meet the Nawab, to put the garland round his neck, the Nawab would stab him The Nawab's procession came near the house Tapibehn was

unhappy but would not dare to restrain Maneklal He quietly slipped a revolver in his pocket, took the garland and went out and garlanded the Nawab The Nawab, dead drunk, could not summon up courage to unsheathe his sword The procession passed by and Maneklal returned unhurt to his house "In those few minutes we lived many lives", writes Munshi

Munshi did not inherit the robust physique of his father Even as a child he was delicate and showed the characteristic which has persisted till now—a lack of appetite It required all the patience and skill of his mother and three sisters to feed him as he toddled from room to room This may have retarded his normal physical development But Munshi's urge to write, and ever to write, was inherited from his parents Even Maneklal, the efficient official, had literary leanings and once wrote a drama in verse Tapibehn, in spite of her negligible formal education, knew *akhyans* (the Puranic episodes rendered in Gujarati verse) by heart and composed poems and discourses, she even wrote her memoirs, if only for unburdening her heart From her own experience she wrote out maxims of conduct It is almost impossible to render in English the natural charm of her simple language or the nobility of her sentiments She was extremely religious and fed her son—one might say gorged him—with stories from the *Ramayana, Mahabharata,* the *Puranas* and particularly legends of the Bhargavas and their great ancestor Parasurama Later, her 'Bhai' read all that has ever been written about Parasurama and the Bhargavas, wrote a brilliant series of novels on the sage, and selected particularly the same subject for his Thakkar Vassonji Madhavji Research Lectures in the Bombay University, collected and published under the title *Early Aryans of the West Coast* The sophisticated Westernised Indian woman of

today might call Tapibehn superstitious Fortunately it was so, for, unable to consult the latest books on child psychology, Tapibehn and Maneklal transmitted to their son the best that they possessed—character, aspiration and faith in God

Those were the days of high orthodoxy If while going out for a caste dinner, after bathing and arraying himself in a silken *pitambar*, accompanied by the Muslim servant, Mohammad Shafi, Munshi touched an untouchable by accident, he had two ways open to him He had either to go home and take another bath, or touch Mohammad Shafi so that the two negatives might make a positive

Later Tapibehn came to change her outlook gradually Reacting to the progress made by her son, ultimately, as we shall see, she actively supported her son's marriage with a Jain widow, she did so because her son was her dearest possession, the dominating interest of her life His happiness was her own She had had a miserable childhood, her daughters had been widowed early, her husband had died, even her two daughters had died, leaving to her the burden of bringing up two grand-children Mother of seven children, she was left with only one son and a daughter She therefore dedicated herself to her son's welfare What interested him engrossed her attention When he took to politics, she took interest in it When he narrated to her the substance of the English novels he read, she heard them with avidity For instance, *The Three Musketeers* was Munshi's favourite book during his school days Tapibehn heard from him over and over again the exploits of the French musketeers, and when the grandchildren came, it was she who first narrated the story to them This was a wonderful mother-son relationship The son was ever dutiful and affectionate He was meticulous about her tastes and inclinations He did well in his examinations,

loved the mother, respected the father's memory, and had scarcely any vice, fashionable or unfashionable. Munshi never even tried smoking. What more could a mother want?

3

MUNSHI, THE BOY

Maneklal Munshi wanted his son to enter the Indian Civil Service and took his education into his hands when he was barely five years old. Munshi began the study of English, with the *Reading Without Tears,* taught by his father. As his mother remained at Broach, Munshi lived with his father, a lonely child with no companions and no opportunity for games. As a result, he was forced to invent a world of his own imagination.

A theatrical party came to Surat where Munshi lived with his father, and the actor-managers stayed as Maneklal's guests for some time. Munshi's father was their patron and when the theatre was ready and the play staged, Munshi went to see the shows almost every day. As he says, he was transfigured like Narsi Mehta when the poet saw Radha and Krishna dance in a trance. The appearance of Parasurama on the stage and the love scene of the hero and heroine in the *Premachandrika* created a tremendous impression on the boy. He still remembers some lines from the *Premachandrika* which he heard in 1897. His father however did not approve of Munshi's enthusiasm for the theatre and restricted his visits.

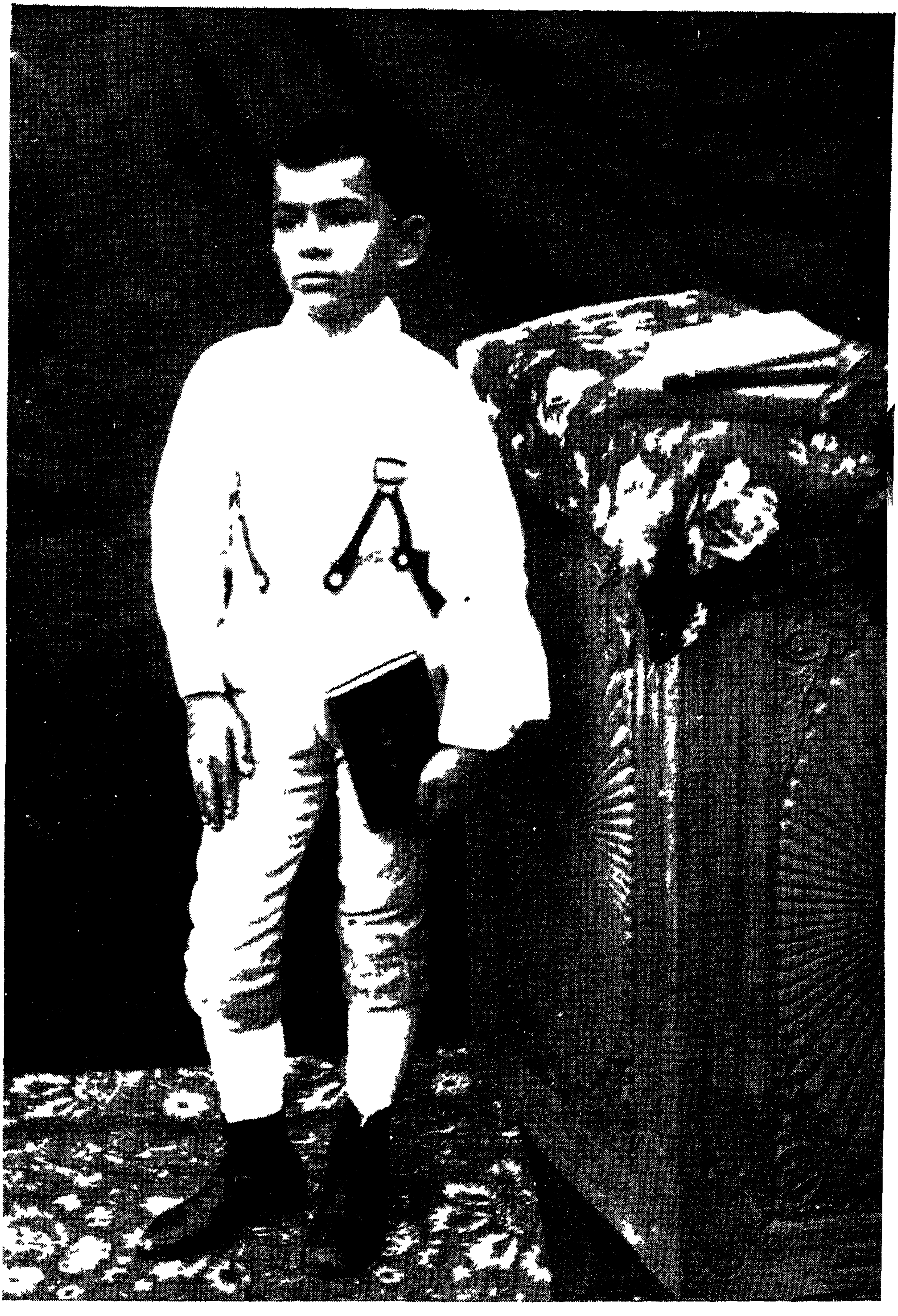
Maneklal was now the Diwan of Sachin. The family properties had been partitioned and he spared no expenses

in celebrating the sacred-thread ceremony of Munshi. Munshi was anxious to be transformed into a Vedic Sage and followed the prescribed instructions diligently After he was invested with the sacred thread, full of enthusiasm he came back to Sachin There he was cheated at cards by a friend, the son of his father's clerk, who had received the sacred thread about the same time Being very agitated, he broke with his friend and in a flash saw the reason for his downfall In a towering rage he took up his pen and started writing the book *The Daily Duties of a Brahmin* Unfortunately the ten-year old boy gave up his first attempt at authorship But, being a serious-minded boy, he began a diary The first entry is dated January 1, 1897 and it begins with a quotation from Bhartrihari's *Niti Shataka*

About the same time, when he accompanied his father to Nasik on a pilgrimage, he saw the city of Bombay Evidently at first look it was not attractive Munshi studied his first three standards in English in Surat and then joined the school at Dhandhuka where his father was transferred He failed in his examination Luckily his father found a competent teacher who coached him in English. After two months Munshi was promoted to the upper class His father, satisfied with the boy's progress, presented him with a few novels of Sir Walter Scott, including *Rob Roy* Munshi did not understand them fully, but they thrilled his imagination all the same.

The next year, 1900, Maneklal was transferred to Broach as Deputy Collector Munshi then joined the local High School It was at that time that Munshi met Dalpatram, his lifelong friend, whose nobility even poverty could not dim Munshi has gratefully described this friendship in one of his *Kulapati's Letters*

Started at his father's instance, theatrical companies



Munshi in 1900

came to Broach and staged several plays, among which was *Jagatsimha,* adopted from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Durgeshanandini* and *Shivaji* In those days the plays started at 9-30 at night and ended at dawn For three months each year the troupe came to Broach and Munshi hardly missed a show On the one hand novels like *Ivanhoe* and *The Three Musketeers*, and on the other, plays like *Shivaji* and *Jagatsimha* kept the precocious boy in a romantic world of his own It would, however, not be correct to say that Munshi as a boy was day-dreaming all the time

In 1901, his teacher delivered a lecture on the Reformation in Europe Munshi, then thirteen, pondered over the lecture and concluded that God was capable of understanding prayers in any language and that there was no necessity to pray only in Sanskrit He writes in his diary "Therefore, from now on I shall perform my *sandhya* in Gujarati " He discussed the problem with his mother and she approved of his decision He then took the help of a Sanskrit scholar and translated the *sandhya* into Gujarati He also translated his mother's favourite hymn *Ramastavaraja stotra* into Gujarati But he found that performing *sandhya* in Gujarati was different from performing it in Sanskrit—its efficacy disappeared when he read that the prayer was addressed to the Sun

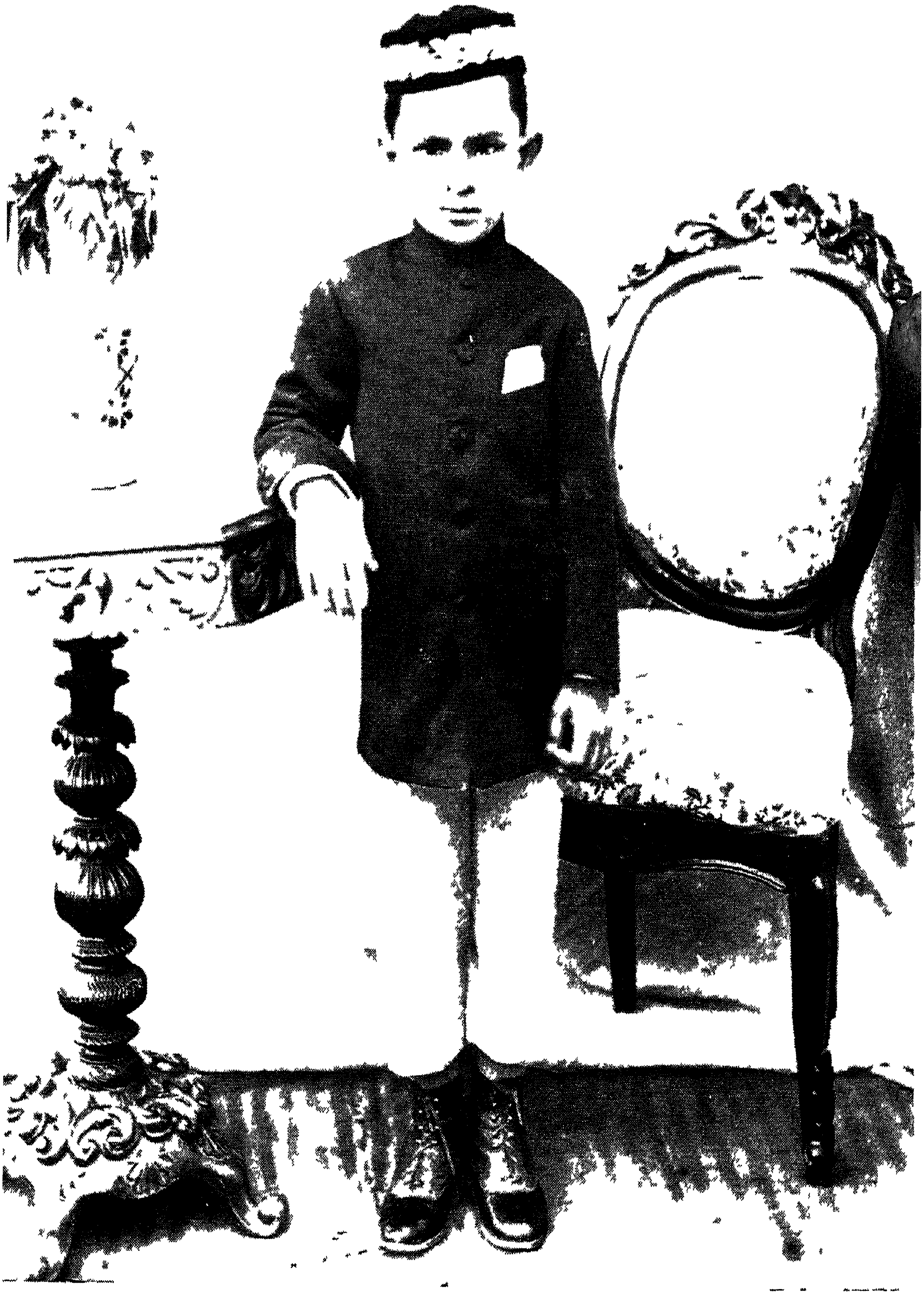
On 29-3-1901 he writes in his diary "How long shall I have to perform the *sandhya?* It says that Sun is God, that His devotees acquire property and salvation, but my astronomy says that sun is a shining star There is no harm in recognising the benefit we derive from a physical phenomenon, I must worship the Creater of this sun, who is One and Indivisible " Soon he gave up his *sandhya,* and the *rudraksha* beads

To understand the psychology of young Munshi one

has to take into account the three passions of his adolescence passion for romance, religious fervour and devotion to parents From his early years all the three were in full operation His passion for reading romance and indulging in day-dreams had no doubt their harmful effects His appetite for the romantics grew on what it fed In the Matriculation Examination he had to write an essay on "Your Favourite Pastime" Munshi's thesis was "Reading Novels" That was his only pastime He never cared for sports In his autobiography he describes how he made fun of every game in all of which he proved a failure He was a very sensitive man and hated failure He gave up all attempts to excel in sports and concentrated on reading novels This was little compensation for the mental agony of his adolescent years, as he pined for his dream-girl, who as we shall see, never left him till he married Srimati Lilavati

The trouble, or one may say Munshi's love-life, if such a term can be applied to a boy of eleven, started at Sachin In his autobiography Munshi states that he has not visited the place since he left it in 1899 He has good reasons to avoid a town which has only unhappy memories Further on he says

> "My memory of Sachin centres round a girl of 8 or 9, fair, spirited, loving, playful We used to play together, sometimes we quarrelled, sometimes we read together She had a deep attachment to me What world did my imagination not create around her but only to be destroyed?
>
> "For many years the flow of imagination and literature was fed by the memory of a foolish imaginative boy's emotional experience of three or four months I have given a colourful picture of these days in my story *Verni-Vasulat* However I do



Munshi in 1896

not desire that a description of such a common experience of a real life here should destroy the charm of that picture"

Again, Munshi writing of his college days says

"I was changing slowly, but a part of my life remained what it was Sometimes when I used to walk about in the terraces of the College alone, I would see my little friend of Sachin standing before me At such times I wept, overcome with emotion. Whenever I read a novel, I felt as if we were its hero and heroine These were realities of the world of my imagination"

Munshi was married before he joined college His parents, following the custom of those days, used to discuss Munshi's betrothal when he was only a child One of his earliest memories is of relatives coming to his house, each bringing a small girl, and his parents discussing her merits and demerits After great deliberation, a girl of four was selected, and brought to Surat for a few days where Munshi remembers running to her with a small piece of sugarcane So far all was good

In 1900 Maneklal, having worked hard to combat the famine that afflicted the Broach district, had an attack of erysipelas For a few days he hovered between life and death He took this as a warning and decided to celebrate the marriage of his son, the only social duty he had not yet performed

Munshi was only thirteen at the time, studying for his Matriculation His wife, Atilakshmi, was nine years old, but looked a girl of five "I did not want to marry", says Munshi in his autobiography "Firstly, I had decided to marry the friend of my childhood (the girl friend of Sachin) Secondly, my wife was too young and was, even

for her age, too small But I could not state any of these reasons, for I always obeyed my father's wishes "

Munshi then describes his marriage ceremony with a bantering humour, as if the whole affair was a huge joke With a turban on his head and a sword in his hand, he rode to his bride's place Later at night he returned in the wake of a procession with his bride in a palanquin After the fireworks, she fell into a peaceful slumber This was an unfortunate lapse, but she was a normal girl of nine However what Munshi does not record is that he went to celebrate his marriage with tears in his eyes and with vague ideas of suicide But Maneklal Munshi, after he had pledged his word, was the last person to tolerate any romantic nonsense in a boy of thirteen The result, as we shall see, was not very happy

Munshi broke the tradition among the Bhargava boys that none of them could pass the Matriculation Examination at the first chance Munshi expresses his gratitude to a teacher, Uttamram, who instilled in him self-confidence Referring to him Munshi writes "The teacher who can develop self-confidence in his students is the best teacher " He passed the examination Maneklal Munshi was beside himself with joy He embraced his son with tears of joy flowing down his cheeks He himself had not been able to fulfil his desire of passing the Matriculation His 'Kanu' had done it

After anxious deliberation, the affectionate parents decided to send their only son to the nearby college at Baroda which his cousin, Pranlal Munshi was also joining On his first visit to the hostel he cheerfully insulted the superintendent of the hostel, whom he took to be an ordinary student The meeting was unfortunate for the superintendent, who seems to have taken his position too seriously, lacked a sense of humour and was slightly pompous,

which in Munshi's eyes remains to this day an unpardonable lapse in any man He tried to show the Munshi brothers their position They returned the compliment by making his life miserable They took their friends to the theatre as frequently as possible, played all kinds of pranks on him and ultimately drove him into self-chosen retirement in his solitary room

In the Baroda College, Munshi came under the influence of two teachers One was Professor Jagjivan Shah, Professor of Philosophy, who had a strong bias towards Western civilization and who was influenced by the Unitarian ideas of Martineau His favourite student was one P K Desai, the P K of Munshi's *Svapna-drashta* In his diary (1902) Munshi writes "I am fortunate to have P K as a friend He has taught me more than all other friends put together have done" The other teacher was Sri Aurobindo Ghosh of whom we shall speak later

Another influence that began to dominate Munshi was that of Napoleon In his school days he was greatly attracted by the Little Corporal and at the first opportunity purchased Abbot's *Life of Napoleon*, a somewhat laudatory biography, very popular in India at that time. Munshi, who has something of hero-worship in him, made Abbot's work his gospel He fought the battles of Marengo and Austerlitz over and over again in his room in the Baroda College hostel and even began an epic on his hero in iambic pentametre What is surprising is his statement in his autobiography: "Napoleon has still a niche in the sanctuary of my heart"

At that time a change came over Munshi's religious convictions He could not continue the performance of *sandhya* Its place was taken by recital of Gujarati hymns, composed by Bholanath Divatia in his *Prarthanamala* He began to lose faith in the caste system For a time Chris-

tianity attracted him, but having come across Dean Farrar's *Jesus Christ,* which he read with great interest, Christianity lost its appeal He wrote in his diary "The conception of God in Christianity is foolish God is conceived as a man with a son and a throne Christianity is childish " This shows the peculiarity in Munshi's character, namely his capacity to change from one extreme view to another with all sincerity and seriousness Five years later, he read Renan's *Life of Christ* and changed his view completely "Christ has completely won my heart", writes Munshi "I cannot get any peace of mind unless I can curb my passion for Him " (Diary, February 17, 1907) And Christ still holds a prominent place in his pantheon

P K also introduced him to a series of works on politics He began with Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man,* John Mill's *Liberty,* Michelet's *French Revolution* and other works of a similar nature He writes "When I read the history of the French Revolution I became mad with the ideas of liberty and equality I soon realised that equality was necessary to destroy the basis of the caste system "

An incident of his boyhood now returned to his memory with a new significance When Maneklal Munshi was a Deputy Collector at Broach, his duties took him to the house of the District Collector, where he was usually received with cordiality A new Collector had come to Broach and as Maneklal went to call on him taking Munshi with him, his carriage was stopped at the gate by a chaprasi The new Collector had ordered that no vehicle should be permitted in the compound Maneklal Munshi became red in the face However, he controlled himself and went to meet his superior officer To Munshi, who was then with his father in the carriage, this came as a rude

shock He realised that the Whites were the masters, that his father whom he idolised as Sage Jamadagni, was a slave, just that and nothing more Munshi was reading Scott's *Ivanhoe* at the time and nick-named the Collector 'Brian de Bois Gilbert' the wicked Knight Templar But now in the College, and in the light of his study of the French Revolution, he saw the incident in the background of the Indian situation

In December 1902, Munshi wanted to join the volunteer corps which was then being recruited for the annual session of the Congress, to be held at Ahmedabad But his father forbade it "I eat the salt of the Government", said Maneklal Munshi, who scarcely fails to flare up when opposed, retorted "Did the British Government bring the money from England?" His father was very angry but at night Tapibehn managed to bring him round to a conciliatory mood It was agreed that Munshi should not join the volunteer corps formally, but go to Ahmedabad with his father who had consented to attend the Exhibition which was to be opened by the Commissioner Munshi has described this session in his *Svapna-drashta* For the first time he realised what the expression 'my country' stood for Of Surendranath, who presided over the session, Munshi writes "Few can realise today the place of Surendranath in the hearts of young men of that time" Many were the great leaders of the country with whom Munshi worked, but of these influences, the first was the most remarkable Munshi was overwhelmed by Surendranath's oratory and even today can repeat from memory many passages from the speech of that great mid-Victorian orator

The Congress session had a memorable effect on Munshi's career He was determined to master the art of public speaking He studied and re-studied the passages

of Demosthenes and Cicero from Blair's *Belles Lettres* He committed to memory several addresses of the Indian leaders as also the speeches from *Chamber's Elocution* and of Patrick Henry Every evening at 7 o'clock he went to the College Hall, empty at that hour, and thundered his orations When he came to Broach, he went to the river-side under the railway bridge and declaimed at the top of his voice He did not forget histrionics either The young orator stood before his mirror acting the different roles from Shakespeare

There was, however, more than one reason for this tremendous preparation He was once asked to speak at a College Debate on Shivaji, his favourite hero He had made assiduous preparations but when he went to the platform, the future leader of the Bombay Bar and the mass orator of Chowpatty could only blurt out "My friend has just stated that Shivaji received a sword from Mother Bhavani To believe this in the twentieth century is nonsense" His head began to whirl, he forgot the notes he had in his pocket and nervously stepped down from the platform Munshi is a very sensitive man who hates to be a failure and does all in his power to overcome his deficiency Most of his early failures only prodded him on to develop his latent powers and natural gifts He however took his studies lightly He did not like mathematics and possibly did not give it sufficient attention In the first university examination he failed to secure pass marks in mathematics

Death came to Munshi Heights The three brothers of Maneklal died, one after another The same year he lost his two eldest daughters Each of them left a child and the burden of bringing them up fell upon this unhappy couple On the night of May 1, 1903. Maneklal Munshi helped Tapibehn to check the household accounts

for April As usual, the few annas which were left in the purse were handed over to their son who soon fell asleep At midnight Maneklal Munshi had a heart attack As a conscientious officer, he had worked too hard, now he had to pay for his devotion to duty The doctors came, for a time he partially recovered On May 8, as he was getting up to go to dinner, he had a stroke to which he succumbed within a few seconds

4

MOTHER AND SON

On his father's death, a new sense of responsibility was born in the fifteen year old boy "I felt as if a crown had dropped off from my head All my life I had been protected by my father, his money and position Now he was dead and I felt helpless The burden of bringing up two young orphans, my nephews, was on me Mother was now alone So it was my duty to assure her I, therefore, decided to give up my studies and secure a job "

For Tapibehn, reeling under the shock of her husband's death, almost the first thought was how to provide money for her son's education Even as she made preparations for the *shraddha* ceremony, she began to take stock of the situation Munshi advised her to sell some furniture and other articles of luxury "Kanu, don't be afraid You need not sell anything nor give up your studies I will look after everything", she replied with tears in her eyes

The obsequies were performed in a manner befitting the status of Maneklal Munshi After all the ceremonies were over, Tapibehn got together all that they had, collect-

ed the insurance money and sold some of her ornaments This sum was invested

The cook and the servant were dismissed The old faithful servant Muhammad Shafi, begged to be discharged, as he had secured a better job in a mill

"Muhammad, if you are not with us, who will look after your little master?" Tapibehn asked him

Muhammad looked at Munshi for a moment "That's right, mother, I stay" He stayed

Many a time after this Muhammad received offers of better jobs, but he kept true to his promise to look after his 'little master' As his salary was not sufficient to maintain him, he and his two wives made *bidis* in their spare hours and earned a little extra money But the prestige of the 'little master's' family was safe in his honest hands

Muhammad Shafi was a pious Muslim, who read his *Qoran* and scrupulously followed the injunctions of his religion For many years he would not allow himself to be photographed, for he thought it to be un-Islamic Yet it was this orthodox follower of Islam who not only supervised all the affairs of a Brahmin family, but even kept a sharp eye on the priest to see that he performed the daily *puja* properly The devotion of this noble soul did not go in vain When the 'little master' began to earn money, Muhammad Shafi was his first charge and the rest of his life was spent in comfort

For the moment, however, the situation was bleak From the total income which came only to four hundred rupees a year, Tapibehn had to pay for Munshi's education about one hundred and seventy-five rupees and eighty-four rupees for Muhammad Shafi's salary Another part-time maid servant, who used to clean the utensils and wash the clothes, had to be paid about four rupees a month With the balance, that is, less than one hundred rupees a year

Srimati Tapibehn Munshi 1913

Tapibehn had to manage her household, bring up her two grandchildren, and maintain her status Almost all the work of the house she did herself

Amidst all these troubles, Tapibehn and Munshi had to face a peculiar litigation A few days after the death of Maneklal Munshi, a wily neighbour headed a claim for a part of the Munshi Heights As the latrines stood on the disputed property, Munshi had described this incident as the *Jajru Purana* in his autobiography But at that time the situation was anything but humorous Every now and then the neighbour would shout from the street that the Munshis were occupying the heights under false pretences For young Munshi, this humiliation was worse than losing his property, till now his father's prestige had protected him from all insults This absurd claim based on a document of 1800 led to lengthy litigation, which was finally decided in 1913

With his father's death Munshi applied himself seriously to his studies and passed the examinations regularly However, the text books did not satisfy his passion for reading and he sought solace in English poetry, his favourite authors at this time were Burke and Mill, Byron, Tennyson and Shelley Shelley he liked most, and he still loves to read and discuss Shelley's works, or anything written about Shelley Even now he can recite from memory his favourite English poems which cover a wide range of authors

At this time he also started to practice writing and for two years (1904-1906) followed implicitly the directions given in Dr Blair's *Belles Lettres* In 1904 his first article in English on Dayanand Sarasvati appeared in the College magazine, the same year he passed the Intermediate examination in the second division

It was about this time that Munshi came into contact

with Prof Ghosh, later Sri Aurobindo, then alternating as a professor of English and private secretary to the Gaekwad Munshi's first reaction to Professor Ghosh was unfavourable, for the latter had, in an address to the College Debating Society, preferred the British constitutional monarchy to a Republic But when Sri Aurobindo gave up his European ways of life and began to practise Yoga, Munshi developed a high regard for him

Politically, this period was a landmark in India's future development In 1903, Lord Curzon spent three crores for his Durbar at Delhi, and Lal Mohan Ghosh, in his Presidential speech at the Congress described it as a 'pompous pageant to a perishing people' The Russo-Japanese war broke out and the Indians of Munshi's generation watched with breathless interest the unprecedented spectacle of an Asiatic nation defeating one of the major powers of Europe Munshi's imagination was fired He began to think of India's independence and expound this theme to his friend Acharya But probably Munshi's ideas were too visionary, for even his friend, Acharya, used to make fun of him So Munshi kept his revolutionary ideas to himself and elaborated his ideas as he paced the terrace of his College alone

The days when Munshi stayed at Broach for his vacations were red-letter days for Tapibehn She would prepare his favourite sweets, clean the rooms, and spread new covers in the drawing room Then, Munshi, or 'Bhai' to use Tapibehn's pet name for him, would come and relate to the eager mother all he had learnt during the session, history of England and France, the achievements of the Congress, of Surendranath, Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal Munshi's discussions with his mother also embraced metaphysics, God, soul and its transmigration, caste system, and re-marriage of widows The lonely

widow hung on every word of her son, she encouraged him and, years later, to a slight extent influenced by Munshi, she led a successful movement against widows being forced by custom to undergo the torture of a tonsure For the rest she remained what she was, a pious Brahmin lady, who wished to enjoy in her love for her son the feelings of Yashoda for Krishna

Her day began with the song *"Jago Yadava Krishna Kanhaiya"* She sometimes composed a few similar songs herself *"mata Yasoda Krishna jagava, jago Nanda dulare re"*

His mother's single-minded devotion to Munshi had a profound influence on him He respected the susceptibilities of his mother and tried to perform faithfully all that she expected him to do She also induced in him a lasting religious attitude In his early days Munshi had great regard for Renan's *Life of Jesus Christ* for its rejection of all the miracles associated with Christ This attitude coloured most of his Vedic and Puranic novels and dramas, for the great Sages have been reduced by him to human proportions At the same time, he could not contemplate Siva or Sri Krishna, Vyasa or Parsurama without deep reverential awe Even now, if possible, he will avoid reading a modern biography of an Indian saint written on Renan's principle Possibly, he finds it difficult to give up the early ideas inculcated by his mother

Tapibehn's greatest care in these days was to maintain 'Bhai' as his father used to, 'Bhai' should not go to the market, he should not feel the humiliations which went with poverty, he must be respected as the son of Maneklal Munshi

Munshi used to return to his house at eight in the evening, and any delay would cause Tapibehn torments of anxiety One evening Munshi returned at nine, Tapi-

behn was in tears, as Munshi casually explained how he was detained over a discussion with some of his friends Tapibehn without a word of reproach, merely said "But Bhai, your dinner is getting cold" Something in her voice struck him as a blow Munshi writes in his autobiography "Thirty-five years passed 'Bhai' became old, but if he did not return by eight, mother would ask, 'Why has Bhai not returned?' Her son too would be most unhappy if he were detained after eight in the evening"

A secret sorrow haunted Tapibehn Munshi had been married against his will, if Atilakshmi the young bride, did not come up to his expectations, his life would be ruined Tapibehn knew her son too well to believe that he would be happy with an uneducated girl as the partner of his life

Atilakshmi was nearly twelve, the age at which a bride came to live with her husband's family in those days She was beautiful but though twelve looked like a child Her family lived near the Munshi Heights and Tapibehn saw her practically every day This in a way increased her anxiety, for Atilakshmi's parents completely neglected her education Tapibehn decided to make arrangements for Atilakshmi's education and bring her to the Munshi Heights This infuriated Atilakshmi's parents She certainly would go and live with her mother-in-law, but not for passing examinations, if Tapibehn had wanted an educated daughter-in-law, she should have gone elsewhere Rukhiba came to their help "I know Chiman Munshi's daughter (Tapibehn), she will ruin Ati's life" But Tapibehn knew her son and wanted Atilakshmi to be a wife fit for him

Tapibehn, however, had to take a decision She brought Atilakshmi to the Munshi Heights, the latter's

relatives became somewhat truculent, and Tapibehn forbade her to go to her parents' house and took the education of her daughter-in-law into her own hands Then began her affectionate but arduous effort to mould Atilakshmi which met with rare success Munshi wrote in his diary on April 19, 1904 "Ati is coming here but she is absolutely uneducated Her mother does not teach her, nor allow my mother to do so "

Again, we find Munshi writing on February 5, 1905: "My wife must come to live with us, but how shall I spend the rest of my life? What will it lead to? What will my wife be like? I may have peculiar feelings and ideas, but can one live perpetually unhappy?" Ultimately, Munshi came to a resolution "Even if this girl does not turn out as I want (her) to, I shall mercilessly force myself to lead a straight and honest life "

Atilakshmi, now thirteen, knew that her husband was reading in the Baroda College When he came to Broach, she peeped at him, an extremely fair boy, from behind the shutters Sometimes she went to his place and ate from the plate on which he had just taken his meals This was normal, she was content and happy, her boy-husband was thought to be the coming man of the community, her friends were jealous of her She was only afraid of her mother-in-law People called her 'manly-woman', for she put on spectacles and kept accounts like a man !

Eagerly, Atilakshmi listened to Tapibehn when she explained the likes and dislikes of 'Bhai,' what food he liked and how to prepare it Under the mother-in-law's affectionate tutorship she began to grow into a true Indian wife

In April the College closed for the summer vacation Munshi came home and at night Atilakshmi went to meet

him. She had heard stories from her friends, and that some husbands beat their wives Would her husband be like that ?

Anyway she had to go and so she went Munshi was sitting on a swing "Come and sit here," he said, but there was no smile of welcome on his face Atilakshmi went and sat

"Can you read ?"

"Yes, I am reading the second book" Before she could decide whether her husband meant this question to be an insult, he—not she— burst into tears This took her completely by surprise, for she had never heard of a husband crying on the first night She did not know that her husband's ideal bride at this time was one modelled on Rosalind, Elizabeth Bennet, or Shirley, who could break the monotony of small talks by discussing Kant and Spencer

Munshi was writing in his diary at this time that his ideal wife was someone like Tilottama, the heroine of Bankim's *Durgeshanandini* At the end of vacation he wrote "I have never spent a more wretched vacation My heart is broken My happiness is gone A shadow has crept over my home When shall I be happy—when? When will this incessant pain end?"

But as Munshi writes in his autobiography "Lakshmi (his pet name for her) was ignorant but innocent and had the highest regard for me I could see in her devoted eyes only respect for me It was impossible to be cruel to her, so I began to control myself strictly "

Munshi would have been successful in this effort, but for his dream-girl who haunted him day and night He developed an idea that he was being faithless to her whom he now began to think of as 'Devi,' a goddess She now appeared as the neglected heroine of the melodrama which

had fired his imagination, and he visualised her with a broken heart calling him. This continuous day-dream, bordering on hallucination, shattered his nerves and he decided to commit suicide. He did not know of any poison more potent than tincture of iodine of which he purchased a bottle, but, as he wrote his last letter, he developed a high temperature. The letter and the bottle of iodine fell into the hands of a devoted friend. After Munshi recovered from fever, this friend talked to him about what he had written in the letter and Munshi narrated to him what he calls 'his tale of woe.' Ultimately the friend made Munshi promise that he would give up all ideas of suicide.

In February or March 1906, Munshi wrote *Child Lovers*, a story based on his experience at Dumas, a health resort on the seaside near Surat. He had inherited from his mother the habit of relieving an overwhelming emotion by setting it out on paper. It should be remembered that most of his novels and even other writings are, to some extent, autobiographical. The success of his novels from the beginning depended on his realistic approach to the problem of youthful love, of which, in his imagination, he felt himself deprived.

As he grew older, he realised with bitterness that 'Devi' must remain a dream bride and it was the magic of fiction alone which would enable him to share his life with hers. But those years were yet to come. In this period, Munshi spent a miserable life tormented by the thoughts of an imaginary dream bride.

In 1906, Munshi wrote in his diary on his birthday: "I am now eighteen. I have not yet done anything of which I am ashamed, I want to be like this in future. Even if I were to die early, I want do something for my country and countrymen to make me famous for ages."

5

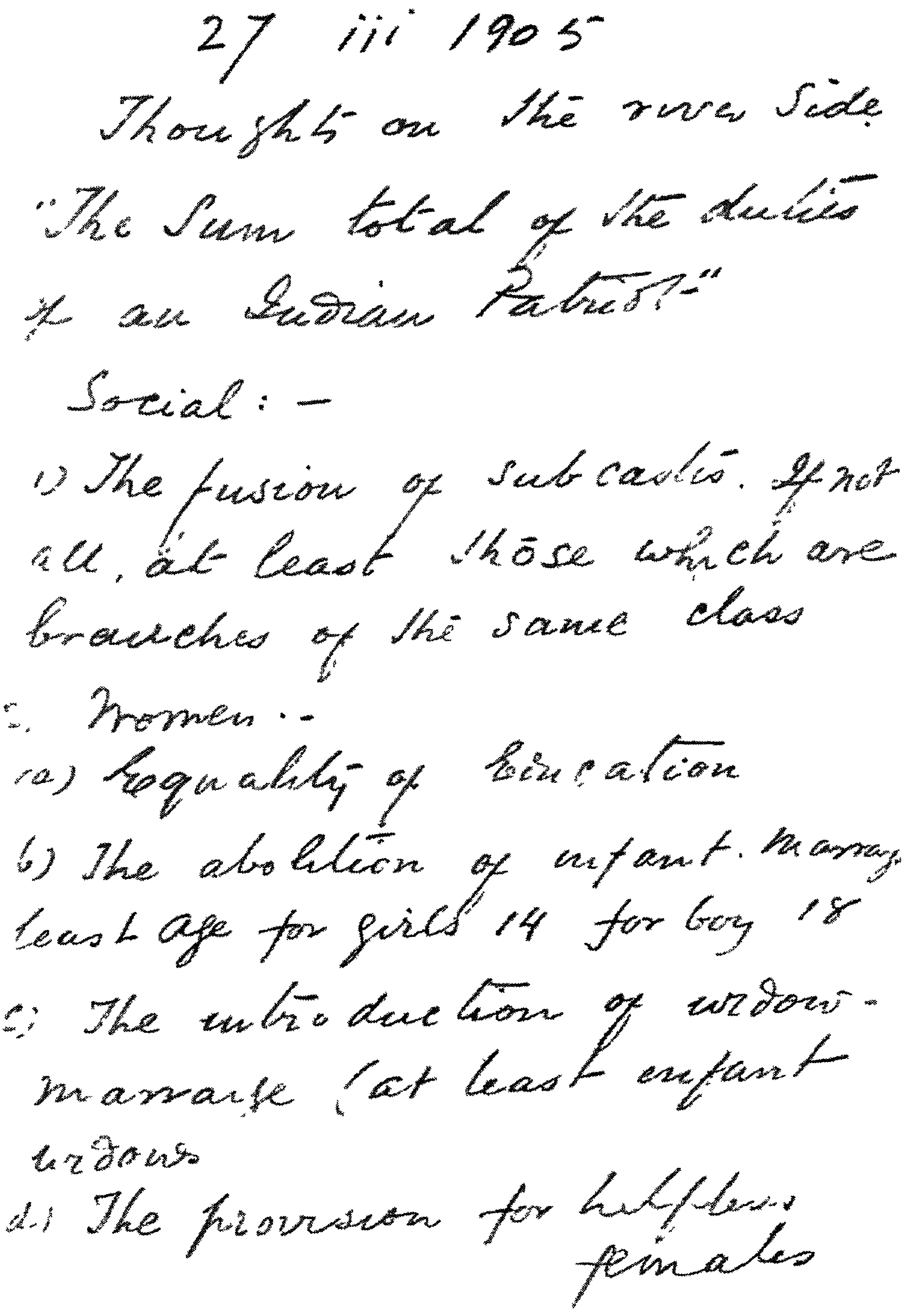
EARLY STRUGGLES

On 27th March, 1905 Munshi drew up in his diary what he considered to be a programme of duties This is interesting from two points of view Firstly, that a teen-ager could have thought out such a comprehensive programme of national regeneration Secondly, that Munshi should have fought for many of the reforms mentioned therein and made his contribution in their fulfilment The following, according to the seventeen year old Munshi, were the duties of an Indian patriot —

1 The fusion of sub-castes
2 Women—equality of education, abolition of infant marriage minimum age for girls 14, for boys 18, the introduction of widow re-marriage (at least for infant widows)
3 Abolition of joint family system
4 Religious liberty
5 Some minor defects such as the purdah system and caste evils

Political Programme

1 The formation of the Indian nation
   (a) The brotherhood of Indians
   (b) A common language English for the elite and Hindustani for the masses
   (c) A common literature
2 Freedom of speech and writing
3 No taxation without representation
4 Universal free education
5 All services, political, civil and military open to merit without distinction of race or religion
6 At last Independence



27 iii 1905

Thoughts on the river side

"The sum total of the duties of an Indian Patriot"

Social:—

1) The fusion of subcastes. If not all, at least those which are branches of the same class

2. Women:-

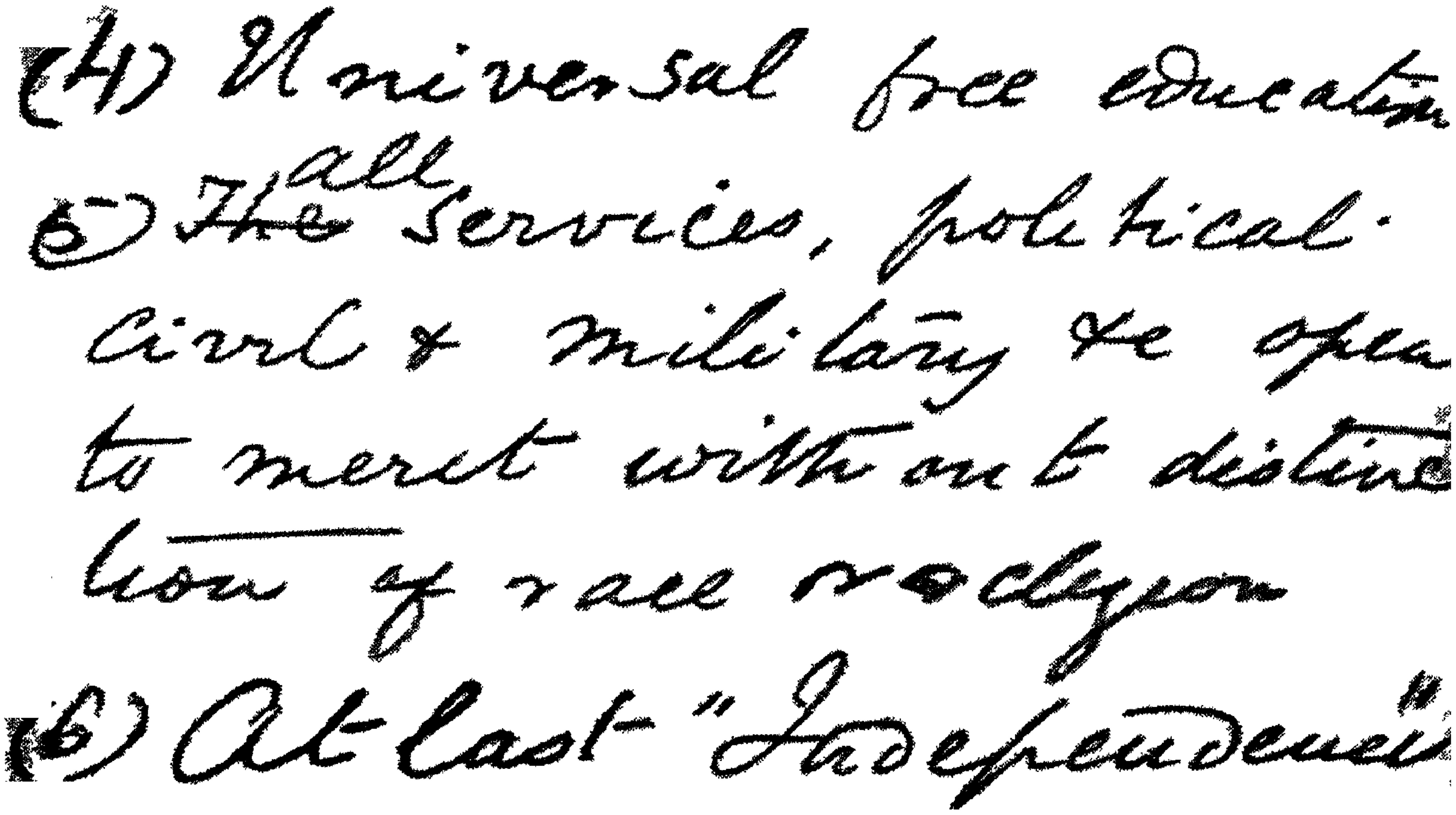
(a) Equality of Education

b) The abolition of infant marriage least age for girls 14 for boy 18

c) The introduction of widow-marriage (at least infant widows

d.) The provision for helpless females

A page from Munshi's Diary



(4) Universal free education
(5) ~~The~~ all services, political·
civil & military to be open
to merit without distinc-
tion of race or religion
(6) At last "Independence"

A page from Munshi's Diary

The political climate in India also was in tune with the young patriot's dreams of national regeneration. On July 1904 the Act for the Partition of Bengal was passed by the British Parliament On August 7, Bengal took the vow of *Swadeshi*, and nine days later, Bengal was partitioned Munshi has written in his novel *Swapna-drashta* (The Dreamer) his reactions to the great movement which convulsed Bengal and fired his imagination

Munshi's friend Mohanlal Pandya was completely under the influence of Sri Aurobindo, then acting as a professor in the College Pandya organised some of his fellow students into a revolutionary group, and Munshi remembers having once met Sri Aurobindo's brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh, who later became famous as the principal accused in the Maniktala Bomb case Barin influenced this group and gave them the recipe for making bombs On a holiday, the boys, under Pandya, met in the Chemistry laboratory, forced the lock and made some unsuccessful attempts at making a bomb

This did not appeal to Munshi He developed a positive antipathy to furtive meetings, forcing locks, and tealing from the laboratory As he frankly admits, possibly he lacked the courage to be a 'terrorist' He therefore left the group, which soon melted away after these unsuccessful attempts at making a bomb

However, Sri Aurobindo's influence on Munshi remained unshaken Sri Aurobindo soon after went to Calcutta, joined politics, and began editing the *Vande-mataram* of which Munshi was a regular reader In his diary he writes (15-2-1906) "Heard the address of Aurobindo Ghosh He said 'The deliverance of India is in our hands You must find your own solution As soon as you adopt the vow of independence your goal will be attained Believe in yourself The moment we (Indians)

decide to rule ourselves, our object will be accomplished.' This was, as Munshi writes, a divine message to him.

When Sri Aurobindo was officiating as the principal of the Baroda College, Munshi and one of his friends went to meet him. With great trepidation of heart Munshi asked him: "How can one become patriotic?" With a disarming smile Aurobindo pointed at the wall map of India and said: "Do you see this map? It is not a map, but the portrait of *Bharat-mata*: its cities and mountains, rivers and jungles form her physical body. All her children are her nerves, large and small. Their literature is her memory and her speech; their vitality is her life; their cultural aspirations her soul; their freedom and happiness her self-fulfilment. Concentrate on Bharat as a living mother, worship her with the nine-fold *bhakti*."

Munshi was disappointed. He had expected that in order to study nationalism, Aurobindo would prescribe the study of some books. "But how shall I concentrate on her?" he asked.

"Have you read Vivekananda?" Aurobindo asked. Munshi confessed he had not. "He has written on *Yoga*: read it carefully, and you will understand."

This was an anti-climax, for Munshi was at this time thinking in terms of Carbonari, Mazzini, Garibaldi and Victor Emmanuel. However, he read Vivekananda and for the first time heard of Patanjali; he then began to read Patanjali in a translation by a Gujarati scholar, Manilal Nathubhai. Of Patanjali's influence on him he writes:

> "Now the *Yogasutra* is an old friend. I have bound and re-bound my copy. I have read it so many times, sometimes without understanding anything, sometimes misunderstanding it. Even to-day, I cannot understand the fourth chapter. But I have read it on the terrace of the Baroda College; I have carried

it from a chawl of Bombay to my Malabar Hill residence, from the Nasik Jail to the Bijapur Jail It is before me as I am writing this (autobiography) in the Yervada jail, while Gandhiji sits yonder under a tree, the embodiment of Yoga Thus Patanjali has been my life's companion,—in my days of misery and of happiness, my saviour who has inspired me and made me what I am''

Munshi understood but little of Patanjali's *Yogasutra* when he first read it, but that little was enough to save him from the harmful effects of Western materialism Vivekananda's works also had great influence on him Gradually he became interested in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was his bedside book for years This had had great influence on his family and his youngest daughter has joined the Ramakrishna Mission to be initiated into *sannyasa*

In 1905, Munshi took a first-class in the first year LL B (permitted to Junior B A student in those days) and won the Ambalal Sakerlal prize In 1906, he felt that if he joined the Elphinstone College at Bombay, he would be able to distinguish himself But Tapibehn could not spare more than Rs 20/- per month for him So with a heavy heart Munshi returned to the Baroda College for his graduation The same year he took his degree with sixty per cent marks in English for which he was awarded the Elliot prize Tapibehn was beside herself with joy But on the third day after the results were out, Munshi fell ill with an attack of typhoid

For twenty-eight days the fever continued Whenever Atilakshmi came near him, Munshi used to shiver and in his delirium cry out "My life is ruined Why do I live? For whom should I live?" Soon after his recovery he had some trouble in his ear and an operation had to be perform-

ed, so that he was bed-ridden for three months However, he read a lot in bed, particularly Carlyle and Chamber's *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*

He also read the *Yogasutra* and the *Gita,* and committed to memory parts of them He found constant repetition of these verses very helpful in his recovery, particularly the verse in the *Gita* in which Sri Krishna exhorts Arjuna to cast off impotence and faint-heartedness and abjures him "Stand up, Parantapa" This was an antidote to the love-songs which filled his mind and which led him constantly to think of his 'Devi'. The constant *japa* of such verses gave him relief, though his dream-bride never left him, but neither did the *Gita* nor the *Yogasutra* The result was a compartmentalised life, a ceaseless struggle for integration of conflicting impulses, an ambition at once to realise 'Devi' through *Yoga,* to work for political ideals, and to make a success of his life

Munshi wrote in his diary on February 26, 1907:

> "At last I am a graduate After studying for five years in the college, I have reached my goal A chapter in my life ends and another begins Due to my laziness I could not avail myself of many opportunities the College life offered
>
> "I can only write a little English I was poor, so I could not leave the Baroda College and my progress was hindered by the longings of my heart But I have realised one thing formerly I thought that I was not intelligent, but that is not true But what shall I do about my health? I am very weak, and I do not know how to get rid of this weakness
>
> "My father is no longer alive to see his dear son While he was with me, I accomplished nothing Had he been living, he might have been proud of me
>
> "He could have sent me to England to become a

Civilian. Now when I am qualified to sit for the (I.C.S.) examination, I haven't the money. Had he been living, how different would my life have been! Now I am thinking of becoming a solicitor, if health permits."

Munshi drifted into law. On September 27, 1907 he wrote: "My future is dark. I have no money, I lack self-confidence, so I have given up the idea of becoming a solicitor. Now all that remains is to be an LL.B. and an advocate. Shall I be a successful advocate? I don't know. It is a very uncertain and difficult profession, and over-crowded. But what else can I do? I shall have to work very hard."

One day in June 1907 he arrived at the Charni Road station in Bombay. It was early in the morning, but his friend Dalpatram had come to meet him. He took charge of the trunk and Munshi carried his bedding and as they passed through the streets of Bombay stirring into life, Munshi says that he felt that a new chapter had begun for him.

It was, however, a dismal beginning with only twenty rupees in his pocket. For a few days he put up with his maternal uncles, Tapibehn's step-brothers. They lived in a two-roomed tenement in a filthy Pipalwadi-chawl, and in the two rooms, besides his uncle and aunt and other uncles, lived three or four paying guests. To reach the main road one had to wade through slush or jump from stone to stone.

Though the uncle and the aunt tried their best to make Munshi comfortable, his first problem was naturally to move elsewhere, for which his twenty rupees were not enough. So Munshi and Dalpatram evolved a plan. Munshi had secured the Ambalal Sakerlal prize of Rs. 105 and the Elliot prize of Rs. 30. Dalpatram took Munshi to a well-

known firm of booksellers whom he knew and after a little talk, entered into a bargain As a result the book sellers, submitted a bill for Rs 105 to the Baroda College for the books supplied to Munshi When they received the money, they gave Munshi five rupees worth of books and the balance, one hundred rupees, in cash

Munshi first shifted from his uncle's house to share with Dalpatram and his three friends a small room, eight feet by six, in a lane in Anantavadi The rent of this room was Rs 5/- per month and Munshi had to pay a fifth share For food they went to a "Eating House" at near-by Kalbadevi, where lunch and dinner together cost about five rupees per month Tea was one pice per half cup, known as "single," and Munshi satisfied himself with one anna worth of milk, morning and evening, from a *bhaiya's* shop He also permitted himself the luxury of a little *ghee* with lunch and dinner, carried to the "Eating House" in a small phial in his pocket

After some time Munshi and two other law students decided to stay together and started to search for a room It was no easy matter, for everywhere they had to answer the inevitable question "Where is your wife?" "Where is your family?" Munshi's assertion that he was a very good and honest man was not accepted At last one day he went to the Kanji Khetsi chawl at Kandvari, and ignoring the watchman, entered the room where a trustee was seated The trustee on hearing his name asked him "There was one Adhubhai Munshi at Dakore Are you related to him?" "He is my uncle," Munshi replied, and the trustee ordered the man-in-charge to give him a good room

The law classes were held in the evening, so Munshi had the whole day on his hands But there was one trouble, unforeseen and beyond remedy The chawl was tenanted

mostly by Marwaris who left at eight in the morning and returned late in the evening The whole day therefore it was practically converted into a women's club. Unfortunately Munshi's room was near the bathroom, and throughout the morning one woman after another went inside to take her bath, whilst others kept guard outside So Munshi and his friends kept to their room with the door closed At noon the women came out for a hair-do in the open, and again the door could not be left open, not even to have a look at their quarrels

Even with all his economy, Munshi found within a few months that he would have to supplement his remittance by earning something So he first searched for the job of a private tutor One day Dalpatram took him to a Seth who needed a tutor for his son and introduced him as the son of Maneklal Munshi The Seth was glad to see him, he said, for he had been a great friend of Maneklal Munshi, when he was a Deputy Collector He made kind enquiries about Munshi and his family Munshi was so unnerved at being treated with such effusiveness that he had no courage to ask for the tutorship

After this he gave up the idea of becoming a private tutor, and the indefatigable Dalpatram secured for him a job in the office of *Induprakash*—a daily newspaper—as an *ad hoc* proof-reader This was not an entirely new type of work for Munshi, for, in the Baroda College besides writing articles for the College magazine, he had helped his editor friends to correct proofs

Munshi was fed up with this life, he found the chawl with its dirty crowd and evil smell intolerable Bombay seemed a town of demons His daily routine at that time was to finish his morning meal by ten and have some rest, then go out at two o'clock in the afternoon for a cup of tea for 1 pice and *limji* worth another, and then walk to

the Petit Library where he had been granted the favour of free membership, thanks to some friends of Dalpatram. After spending two to three hours at the Petit Library, he would go to attend his law classes in the Elphinstone College and trek back to Girgaum to collect the proofs from the *Induprakash* office and then walk home late in the evening He was paid at the rate of six annas per column for correcting the proofs, but this extra income was absolutely necessary After dinner he would correct the proofs, walk back to the *Induprakash* office, deliver them and then return home He was suffering from undiagnosed appendicitis, and these long walks sometimes brought acute pain Public conveyances were available in Bombay at this time, but Munshi did not have the anna to spend on his tram fare

Thus the days passed and at the end of the year came the Surat Congress Munshi attended it 'as a sort of volunteer' in the extremist camp led by Lokmanya Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bepin Chandra Pal

Next year (1908) Munshi's relative Pranlal, having graduated from Baroda, came to Bombay Munshi, Pranlal and another friend then took a room in Girgaum Road. This room was better than the one in the chawl, and Pranlal's company was very welcome

The lure of the theatre never left Munshi Every Wednesday and Saturday he and his friends gathered at the gate of one or other of the Grant Road theatres The Bombay theatre was then at the zenith of its career of staging costly melodramatic plays in Urdu Munshi and his friends found their seats in the cheapest stall At the end of each month, however, the friends calculated with wry faces the money they had spent on what his cousin, Pranlal, called 'dissipation' But the week was spent by

both Pranlal and Munshi in singing songs from the plays which they had seen the week before

These diversions were a necessity for Munshi Left alone in Bombay he indulged in his day dreams more than ever before For some time he was seized with the foolish idea of tracing the 'Devi' in Bombay He often walked up and down the Bhuleshwar road in the hope of discovering 'Devi' in some passer-by, and when he failed to do so, a wave of depression engulfed him The sight of a postman brought fresh hopes, he might be bringing a letter from her Nothing of course ever came, and Munshi repeated a line of an old Gujarati? *"Ho maney bhuli gayo chhe maro chheldo re"* (My love has forgotten me) Sometimes he found his day-dreams so overwhelming that in order to be left alone he would take the train from the Charni Road station, go to Virar and return in the evening by the next train He would often record his thoughts on scraps of paper some of which are still with him In one of these he writes (19-3-1908) "Is there none to help me? I am dying without love Why was I not born without a heart? Is there no power in the world that can end my existence? Many a time I have thought of striking my head against the wall and thus giving up this life, but my pride prevents me I feel that since I have been blessed with life, I must fulfil the duties imposed on me this would be true heroism."

Munshi had not forgotten his *Gita* he did not yet understand it fully but had committed to memory a few verses which struck him as particularly applicable to him and repeated them innumerable times Thus, unknown to him he was performing the *japa* so highly praised in the *Gita* itself (Canto X, v 25).

The following entry from his diary dated September 22, 1908, is probably due to the influence of the *Gita*:

"You slothful and vain creature," Munshi was addressing himself, "how you are wasting your time! Do you realise your responsibilities? You have only learnt to cry like a woman Like a girl you become disheartened every now and then You must be firm You are so weak that you cannot live by yourself Be strong, be brave, and with your own efforts try to be successful " Munshi may have been reading the works of Vivekananda, for the last sentence is practically a paraphrase of Vivekananda's favourite verse from the Upanishad

Unfortunately, neither the scriptures nor the saints could be of any help As he was getting older, he was becoming conscious that the girl who had filled his imagination since childhood was unobtainable, neither except in day dreams could he hope for the romantic passionate love, of which he read in books But remorseless morbid introspection is dangerous for healthy normal development In Munshi's case the result was disastrous twice he failed in the law examinations

There seems however another reason for Munshi's failure in the law examinations, he did not take it seriously at this time For some time he played with the idea of reading for his M A in History, but gave it up mainly on grounds of health Then he began to study literature, history and other subjects which might help him in the Civil Service examination This led him to the Petit Library everyday, and he utterly neglected law in favour of more congenial subjects like history and literature In a sense it is a pity that Munshi did not obtain his M A degree in History He could have in that case become a famous historian, with all the advantages of an early training in research work which he was never to have But then Gujarati literature would have been poorer, for no trained historian would be able to write his brilliant his-

torical novels where he recreates Gujarat as he imagined her to have been

The day-dreams, which Munshi nursed, helped him to write his first novel, *Verni-Vasulat* A portion of it was only a description of the world of imagination in which he had lived This accounts for the vividness of the book and also for its taking Gujarat by storm

Munshi completed his law lectures in April, 1909 and passed the LL B examination in July 1910 This period he spent in Broach, his last stay in the town of his birth Later he visited Broach from time to time, but Bombay for all practical purposes became his home

Munshi had been an ardent reformer since his college days In 1903, he had shocked the other members of his class by doing away with his *shikha,* the tuft of hair, a hall-mark of the Brahmins He also began to take his meals dressed in an ordinary dhoti instead of the prescribed silk one He soon gained many converts and incited them to educate their wives At Munshi's instance one of his friends began to exercise with a dumb-bell and this infuriated the latter's aunt into a vigorous protest: "You fool, you have a beautiful soft figure like a god's and you want to harden it like a servant's " Munshi was becoming notorious for putting ideas into the heads of the youth of his community

In 1909, Munshi began a crusade against the caste-dinners These were ruinous affairs and people were sometimes forced to sell all their property to provide a caste-dinner

Munshi started his career in social service by organising, along with some friends, a free library in his native town, where they would be free to subscribe to Shri Aurobindo's newspaper, the *Vande Mataram,* since well-established libraries in the town took objection to it This library

was the meeting-place of young patriots who gathered to discuss their ideas Munshi and his friends in spite of some difficulty managed to raise the necessary funds Then when Munshi came to Bombay in 1907 he induced Seth Gordhandas Sukhadvala to pay for building a permanent library at Broach With the Seth's donation Munshi started the *Dadabhai Naoroji Free Library,* which was his first constructive work It was decided that the Library should be inaugurated by Sri Gopal Krishna Gokhale Munshi went to Poona and met Gokhale who readily accepted the invitation But other important engagements precluded Gokhale from fulfilling his promise and the Library was inaugurated by Sir Gokuldas Parikh who was deputed by Sir Pherozeshah Mehta for the purpose This was Munshi's first contact with the leaders of the moderate group in the Congress

It was at this period too that Munshi started writing seriously All his writings however, were in English and were published in the *Hindustan Review, Indian Ladies Magazine,* and the *East and West* It is remarkable that he made no effort to write in Gujarati, the reason probably being that he was completely absorbed in English literature

Munshi now made a last attempt to go to England and appear for the Civil Service examination His friend Dhirajlal Nanavati, later officiating Judge of the Bombay High Court, made some arrangement for his stay in England But the question of money loomed large His uncle Manchhasankar Vakil, a Judge of the Small Causes Court, came to his help and raised about seven thousand rupees from two or three persons Another five thousand could be raised by mortgaging the family property Munshi felt elated at the idea of going to England and returning as a member of the Civil Service or a barrister at a cost of

about twelve thousand rupees He even selected the boat by which he was to sail But Tapibehn took counsel with her step-brother and took into account the probability of Munshi failing in all the examinations in England That would render them destitute So Tapibehn decided against his going to England, and this made Munshi unhappy for a long time

He did not know at the time that he could practise as an advocate on the Original Side and have the same status as a barrister in the Bombay High Court, if he passed the Advocates' (O S) examination

Some of his relatives now advised him to apply for a provincial service In November 1910, there was a vacancy for an auditor in the Co-Operative Department on a monthly salary of Rs 150 Munshi for some time played with the idea of working as an auditor for the few months left before his final law examination The salary was tempting, but Tapibehn rejected this scheme as his health was not good Her step-brother, whom Munshi called Thakur-Mama, wanted him to be a Munsif Munshi writes that one of the charms of the job appeared to be that he would be preceded by one chaprassi and followed by another, so that Munshi Heights would regain its lost prestige

But Munshi refused to try for the post of a Munsif. He had decided to become an advocate on the Original Side of the Bombay High Court, though when he left Broach finally for Bombay, on October 3, 1910, he made out that he was going only to collect his diploma On the same day he wrote in his diary "Whom shall I tell my misery? Where shall I go and weep? I am devoured by indecision I am now going for further studies, to go forward in the world, so I must go with a smile and self-confidence But I am now feeling sad and distracted There is none to make me

happy or give me an impetus, to help me or to make me strong The world is like a jungle, life is painful I shall never receive the love of 'Devi', she, who can drive me onwards and make a man of me, she is not with me Is it my fate to weep for the rest of my life?"

However, the days spent at Broach were not so sad as this entry from the diary may indicate Munshi's health being bad, he was advised by the doctors to take rest and not to concentrate on studies for some time So he purchased a harmonium and began to learn music A teacher was engaged Music was in his family, and this little training made him more music-conscious than before, and he learned to play a little on the *tabla*

There was also another interlude, rather droll, which shows Munshi as the little puritan that he was in spite of d'Artagnan being his favourite hero

Annually, a Yogiraj came to Broach with his disciples to have a dip in the holy Narmada He was quite a celebrity and the pious citizens of Broach flocked to hear his discourses He also gave lessons in Yoga Once Munshi had approached him to place before him his doubts as to whether the caste system was God-ordained Munshi, however, had come away dissatisfied

While Munshi was preparing for his law examination, a lady disciple of this Yogiraj came to Broach for a month's stay on the bank of the holy Narmada Tapibehn and her friends went to hear her exposition of the *Gita* and were charmed by her learning and personality Known as Mahatma, she was invited by Tapibehn to come and spend the month at her house

The Mahatma was about twentyseven, tall, and though not beautiful, in the full flush of her youth which was hardly concealed by the fine white cloth which she wore.

Her eyes had a fire which was undoubtedly attributed by her devotees to the spiritual flame which burnt inside her.

At this time, Munshi practically spent his day in a secluded room on the top storey of the house Across the terrace on the same floor was a lumber room, which the Mahatma selected for herself At dinner the first day, Munshi had the opportunity of discussing the practice of Yoga with her He was then trying to understand the verse *traigunya-vishaya-Vedah nistraigunyobhava-Arjuna* But the Mahatma after a lengthy discourse ended by emphasising that of all the yogas *Prema-lakshana-bhakti*—which I may be pardoned for translating as a 'lover's devotion'—was the best

Munshi, his head full of Kant and Spencer, *Gita* and *Yogasutra,* failed to notice the broad hint of the Mahatma Never before in his life had he talked with an educated woman, and he was happy to have done so now

The next morning as Munshi was playing on the *tabla* in his room, the Mahatma came in Munshi did not like this visit He was disturbed by the thought that he would have to live in close proximity to this woman for at least a month, with no better guardian than a devout mother and a girl-wife

The next day the Mahatma brought to Munshi a letter in Sanskrit addressed to her by the secretary of the Yogiraj, sternly rebuking her Munshi, therefore, grew bolder and asked her what had brought her to Broach She frankly told him that she had been expelled by the Yogiraj from his *ashram* for a year When Munshi asked her to explain the reason, with absolute candour the Mahatma confessed the situation she had been presented to the Yogiraj by her mother when she was an infant widow, the Yogiraj had educated her and ultimately installed her as his *Pat-shi-*

shya, chief lady disciple and consort The Yogiraj, she said, was the head of the *Vama-marga,* the Left-Handed Cult The preceding year when the Yogiraj had gone to Bombay, he was attracted by another woman The chief disciple, not to be out-done, spent her time in the company of another person The Yogiraj naturally became angry, she retorted by saying that if he could pick and choose, so could she The result was her expulsion

This explanation left Munshi aghast With a few remarks, he went down to dinner, and soon found the Mahatma sitting on a swing singing Mirabai's *bhajan* with emotion *Kanudo shu jane mari prit* (What does Kanu know of my love)

The next day the Mahatma was bolder still Calmly she told him that she was practising a form of Yoga, in which according to the *Vama-marga,* a male partner was necessary and Munshi was her choice Munshi expressed his spiritual unfitness to share this honour The Mahatma asserted that he was suitable in every respect Munshi was at his wit's end Ultimately, he hit on a plan and suggested that he should take her to Chandod, a place of pilgrimage on the Narmada, some miles away from Broach, where they could stay at a friend's place She was happy and fell in with the scheme

Munshi then told his mother all that had happened. She also was beginning to have her doubts about the Mahatma The next morning before the Mahatma returned from her dip in the holy Narmada, Munshi bolted from the house, going to the station one hour before the train, and was on his way to Baroda when the Mahatma returned home Tapibehn explained to her that 'Bhai' had suddenly to go elsewhere and that the Mahatma could have Muhammad Shafi to escort her to Chandod

With tears in her eyes the Mahatma left, leaving a final message to Munshi, conveyed through, of all persons, Atilakshmi "Tell Bhai, we shall now meet in the next world" I am sure Munshi sudders at the prospect!

6

ATILAKSHMI

On July 22, 1910, Munshi came to Bombay to take his law degree He was then at a loose end and went to Manchhasankar Kaka for advice As they were talking, a man smartly dressed in the European style descended the stairs with a jaunty air and after a brief greeting to Manchhasankar went away He had really come to see Jamiyatram, brother of Manchhasankar and a leading solicitor of Bombay But the brief appearance of this young man made Manchhasankar turn towards Munshi and say "See, this is luck You don't know him, he is Bhulabhai Desai, once a Professor at Ahmedabad, now an advocate, earning about four thousand a month This fellow has never even been to Europe Why don't you become an advocate like him?" This more or less decided Munshi, and while leaving for Broach, he asked Manchhasankar's nephew, Manukaka, to send him information about the advocateship examination

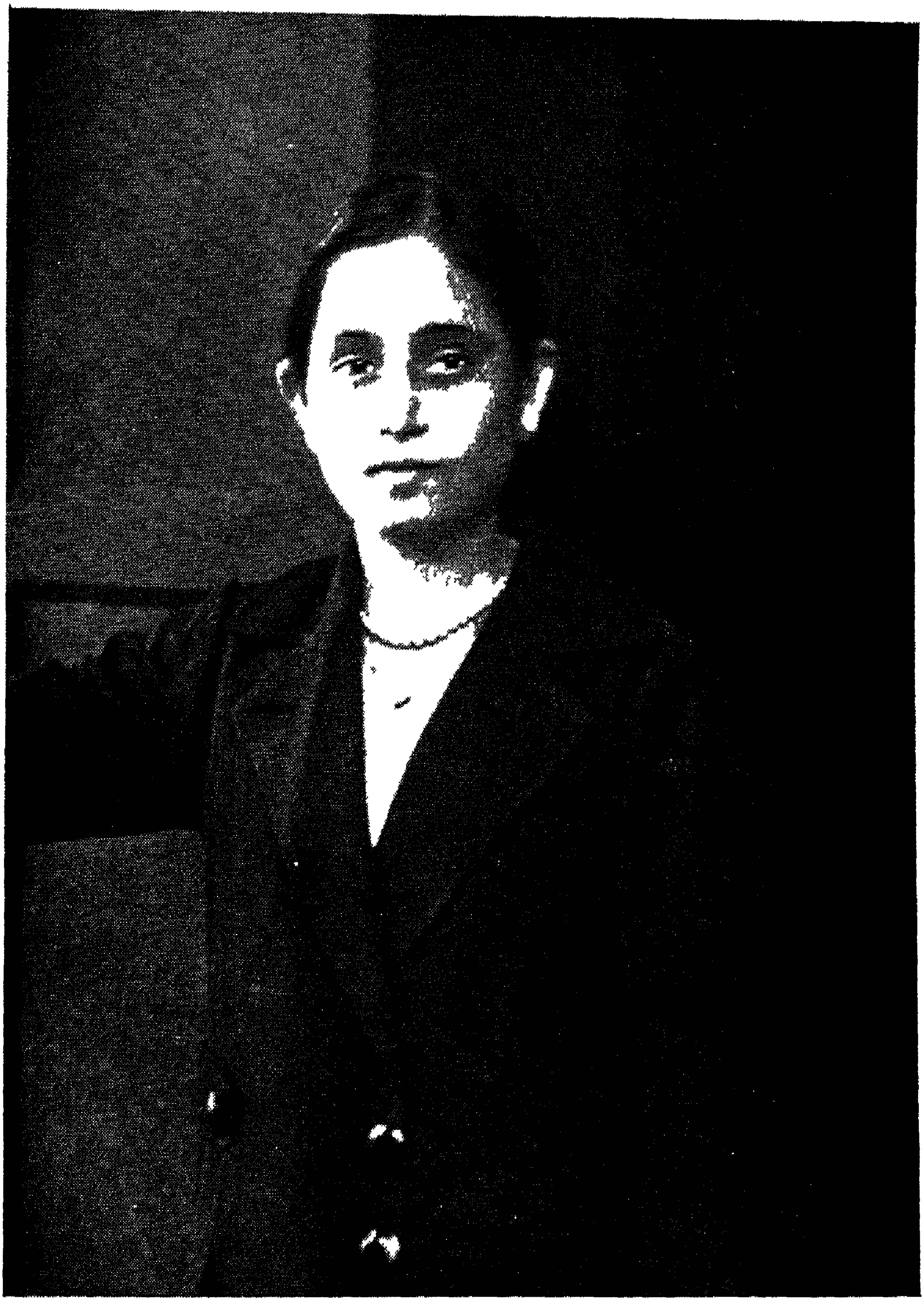
On January 1, 1911, Munshi came to Bombay, and two days later rented a two-room flat in the new chawl of Murarji Gokuldas at twenty rupees per month Soon Atilaskshmi arrived from Broach and took charge of the house and of her unpredictable husband They were young and Atilakshmi was very happy

The flat was small but new and moderately comfortable. What was more interesting was that the young couple at last began to live like grown up people. Manukaka, Munshi's devoted friend, joined them as a paying guest, and solved one third of the money problem by paying his share of the expenses. For the rest Munshi had faith in God, and Atilakshmi in her husband. Some old furniture and utensils were brought from Broach and the new life began, let it be said, with the help of Dalpatram, the faithful friend without whose help the unpractical couple would have been put to great hardship.

It would however be a mistake to suppose that Munshi settled in Bombay with his wife, and began to care less for his mother or to ignore her in any way. As a matter of fact Tapibehn's influence over her son remained the same till her death. She had taught her daughter-in-law how to be a devoted Hindu wife, and the latter had no idea of asserting herself against her mother-in-law.

Of Atilakshmi Munshi writes:

> "During this time little Lakshmi looked after me and soon her unostentatious charm won me over. I was the centre of all her interest. She would get up before I did, and prepare tea for me. She would prepare food I could digest, and this was not an easy thing to do. I was always in bad health and, whenever in a fit of abandonment ate a little too much, had an attack of indigestion, and got angry with Atilakshmi for the extra helping. Some evenings I would return with friends and expect dinner to be ready for them also. And if I had had an unpleasant day, she bore the brunt of it in the evening.
>
> "All my shortcomings, Lakshmi bore with wonderful patience. She was never ill, or, even if she was, I never knew. Somehow or other she stood



Atılakshmı (1923)

in great awe of me But she was never sad nor did she ever complain. She had no friends and had no taste for reading She spent the whole day in her household duties and waited for me to return from work

"Her selfless devotion gradually won me over. Whenever I returned home late I saw her waiting at the windows, her eyes eagerly searching the road for me I soon acquired the habit of looking up at the window as I walked from the bus station to the house, quickening my pace She lived for me and, though self-centred, I began to love her

"She watched over my frail health She was my partner in poverty, a beacon in the darkness that then surrounded me If I returned home with a bruised heart, or humiliated, as she took the cap from my hand with her loving eyes resting on me, I felt peace Her welcome was quiet, but it restored my self-confidence It was my good fortune that Lakshmi was with me during the days of my hard struggle She had faith in me and had developed a complete sense of identity with me She enveloped me in an impenetrable armour of love Without her, my health would have certainly broken down. I still see her beautiful face as it rested on the window sill, her anxious eyes awaiting my return".

Soon, however, Munshi's relationship with Manukaka, his best friend, became estranged He was one of those who would never pass an examination and, even at the sacrifice of his valuable time, Munshi devoted his energies to coaching his friend who simply could not be led to the examination hall When Munshi set up home in Bombay, Manukaka, having repeatedly failed in the previous examination of the Arts course began to study for the District Plea-

easily with her husband Munshi writes "I had two pairs of woollen trousers At night when we were alone, Lakshmi would brush the used pair, carefully fold it, straighten out the creases, and place it under the bed, and while she did this, I sat by her side polishing my shoes for the next day These little things which we did together gave life a new interest, a common link between us Lakshmi had surrendered herself completely to me and had completely won me over"

On July 25, 1911, Munshi went with his friend Chandrasankar to his *mandal* (Literary Club) to hear Kantilal Pandya's lecture on "The Claim of Sanskrit on Educated Indians" At this time Gujarati literature was completely dominated by *Sarasvati Chandra,* the famous novel of Govardhanram Everyone quoted from the *Sarasvati Chandra,* and accepted Govardhanram's dicta as something sacrosanct Kantilal Pandya, the speaker of the day, was the nephew and worshipper of Govardhanram and was followed by three or four speakers who expressed the same sentiments Then Munshi got up After his strenuous training he had done very well in the Baroda College Debating Society, but he was by nature shy and this was the first time he was speaking in Bombay However, Munshi spoke for nearly an hour and tore to shreds the arguments and conclusions of Kantilal It is interesting to note that at his first public appearance in Bombay, Munshi should have spoken on the spread of Sanskrit education Of course, Munshi in this debate stoutly maintained that the first duty of a poor young man was towards his family, learning Sanskrit was secondary, whatever Govardhanram might have said to the contrary At night Munshi wrote in his diary "Everyone congratulated me It was a great victory But who can share this joy with me? 'Devi', what good are all these triumphs if you are not with me?"

Chandrasankar had picked up a chance acquaintance with Munshi a few years before, but they became intimate in 1911 when both were staying in the same chawl The chawl had many tenants from Nadiad, Nagar Brahmins who looked on Chandrasankar as the natural successor of Govardhanram, so that his room was often full of people with literary aspirations Munshi soon became very friendly with Chandrasankar and his wife Vasantba

Every Sunday the friends of Chandrasankar gathered in the Aryasamaj Hall, where Munshi had made his maiden appearance with striking success Yet he was suffering from an inferiority complex as his English pronunciation was not as good as that of a graduate from a Bombay College He was particularly depressed by the superiority affected by the friends of Chandrasankar, all Nagar Brahmins from Nadiad They proudly pointed to a galaxy of names, Mansukhram Manilal Nabhubhai, Govardhanram, Balasankar, Daulatram Pandya, Chhaganlal Pandya and others, great contemporary Gujarati writers, all of whom by a peculiar chance had come from Nadiad The young men from Nadiad, therefore gravely claimed to be the custodians of Gujarati culture and the legatees of the literary craft

This group discussed literature seriously and Munshi was only too glad to participate But the difficulty was that even when the leader Chandrasankar delivered a solemn dissertation, Munshi could not restrain himself from passing some sarcastic remarks Gradually Munshi began even to attack some of the views of Govardhanram, an unheard of act of effrontery in those days.

Munshi could easily acquire a leading position in this literary association for two reasons firstly, his readings were not confined to Gujarati alone, and he knew some-

thing of Englısh and Contınental lıterature Secondly, he brought to lıterary crıtıcısm a fund of common sense

Though at thıs tıme Munshı crıtıcısed others, he hımself wrote nothıng ın Gujaratı He dıd not feel that he would be able to wrıte good Gujaratı He however started wrıtıng hıs letters ın Gujaratı but stıll contınued to ımprove hıs Englısh At thıs tıme Justıce Sır Narayan Chandavarkar used to presıde over the Sunday sessıons of the Socıal Reform Assocıatıon Once he warmly congratulated Munshı for hıs speech on the posıtıon of Hındu wıdows About thıs tıme (1912) Munshı won the Motıvala Prıze for hıs essay on the "Theory and Practıce of Socıal Servıce"

In the same year the assocıatıon to whıch Chandrasankar Pandya had ıntroduced hım was re-organısed as "Gurjar Sabha" and Munshı became a leadıng member and the Secretary of the Sabha He also formed an assocıatıon to unıte the Bhargava Brahmıns of Surat, Broach and Mandvı, and was appoınted ıts joınt secretary The Bhargavas of Broach marrıed Bhargava gırls from Surat but dıd not allow theır gırls to marry a Surat or Mandvı Bhargava Thıs naturally wounded the susceptıbılıtıes of the Surat and Mandvı Bhargavas, and Munshı attempted to undo this ınjustıce Thıs proved helpful when he was a strugglıng lawyer, for ıt brought hım close to the leading solıcitor, Jamıyatram, a member of hıs caste In August 1912, the "Bhargava Quarterly" appeared wıth Munshı as ıts edıtor This was hıs first journalıstıc venture Wıth the help of Dalpatram, he enthusıastıcally set about purchasıng paper, collectıng articles, prıntıng them, and despatchng the Journal He was also elected the secretary of the All India Socıal Reform Conference and helped Srı G K Devdhar ın the "Socıal Servıce League" He also ımproved the posıtıon of the "Education Fund" of

his caste, which he had helped to start in Broach two years back

All these social activities, particularly those on behalf of the Bhargava Brahmins, fortunately produced one good and tangible result Jamiyatram, the solicitor, changed his opinion of Munshi

Amidst all this effort to improve Hindu Society and the Bhargavas in particular, Munshi had been preparing for the Advocates' examination It was one of the most difficult examinations of those days, particularly because it had no prescribed syllabus or text books Jamiyatram once gave Munshi a kindly warning "Bhai, remember, this is not your B A examination" Few, if any, candidates passed at the first attempt

To prepare for the examination it was necessary to leave Bombay, where Munshi had entangled himself in all sorts of social work So on November 28, 1912, he and Atilakshmi went to Dumas to stay in the bungalow of Manchhasankar Dumas was associated with 'Devi', the dream girl and her memory sometimes haunted Munshi but he fortified himself by repeating the formula *niyatam kuru karmatvam* (Always do your duty) After a month at Dumas, Munshi and Atilakshmi came down to Broach from where Munshi returned to Bombay to appear at the examination on February 23, 1913 The examination continued for a week, after which he went to Matheran for a much needed change For the first time in life Munshi saw a hill station which thrilled him and with his friends he roamed over the place On March 11, he received half a dozen telegrams from Bombay congratulating him on his success Next day Munshi left for Bombay and wrote in his diary "Hurrah for success" Not unnaturally, he fell in love with Matheran the only place where he owns a house today

In Bombay he found himself the prize-boy of the Bhargavas who presented him with a laudatory address amidst thundering applause The news was flashed in the *Mumbai Samachar* under the heading "Bombay honours the Broach Advocate"

7

THE STEEP CLIMB

On March 15, 1913, Munshi put on bands and gown borrowed from a friend and appeared before Justice Beauman and was enrolled as an Advocate (O S) Two kindly solicitors sent him briefs on the same day, so that Munshi was elated, as Advocates usually got briefs about a year after their enrolment The next thing to be done was to rent a chamber, and here Jamiyatram came to his help by engaging for him an ill-ventilated little cubicle, almost like a prison cell, at fifteen rupees a month The worldly advice of this great gentleman was "Look here, Kanubhai, whatever happens, pay your rent for the chamber punctually and do not try to adjust it against your fees" This was a damper but, as Munshi admits, was a very sound piece of advice

More than the size and nature of the chamber, which few people were likely to visit anyway, Munshi felt his oppressive poverty when he compared his dress with that of the fashionable lawyers He developed a new type of inferiority complex which would only be overcome when he was able to dress as well as anyone else But that time was yet to come and, during the period of his struggle, his plain dress was an additional source of worry

Speaking of his dress, it may be said here that, as soon as he could afford, Munshi became a dandy by adopting the simple process of walking into the most fashionable tailor's shop and ordering the most expensive suits After joining the Congress he gave up wearing European dress with a vengeance, and even appeared in the High Court in a dhoti But old habits die hard, and even in *khadi* one can be very fashionably dressed—in impeccable white from top to toe with the Gandhi cap at a slightly jaunty angle But we are anticipating

At this time, Munshi was occupied with another difficulty, his pronunciation Now his English pronunciation is fairly impeccable, but he writes that at that time he could not even speak a simple sentence without committing some *faux pas* Several years later, while staying at Darjeeling with Bhulabhai Desai, Munshi one day pronounced the word "juice" as if it were a compound of two syllables "ju" and "ice", as every one did at Baroda Bhulabhai winked at some one who was present and Munshi realised his mistake He felt his disgrace so acutely that about three decades after the incident he remembered it as one of the things that happened to him at Darjeeling Most other people would have forgotten it

These little things may appear trivial, but they reveal his extreme sensitiveness A Court of law is not the place for such young men who are affected by their shortcomings, some inevitable But Munshi also had an iron will and once he made up his mind he let nothing come in his way

Luckily for Munshi he was taken by Jamiyatram as a protégé Jamiyatram not only sent him occasional briefs, but arranged for him to devil under Bhulabhai Desai, in spite of Munshi having developed a fascination for Jinnah So on June 12, 1913, Jamiyatram introduced him to Bhulabhai and a life-long association began

Munshi always refers to Bhulabhai as his *guru* so far as the profession is concerned But what a contrast between the teacher and the disciple! Bhulabhai was a sportsman, a Persian scholar, ignorant of Sanskrit and had little sympathy for Hinduism His suave manner, assertive personality and great subtlety brought him success within an incredibly short time, and Munshi a short slenderly-built man, with all the angularities of a nervous youth, was immersed in Sanskrit and ancient Indian culture Years later, Munshi read the *Gita* to Bhulabhai, and the latter made coarse jokes about it Munshi gave it up as a bad job, but he did not reproach Bhulabhai, which is strange, for Munshi will not tolerate this from anyone else In food and drink too, Bhulabhai was cosmopolitan, while, with all his fondness for European dress, Munshi was, as he still is, strictly orthodox about his food

In his autobiography Munshi devotes a section to describe how he was forced to drink by his seniors, and his horror at having done so But nothing could ever force a morsel of non-vegetarian food to pass his lips The reason, I think, why he allowed himself an occasional sip of sherry or the like was that these, however bad for a Brahmin, are after all vegetable extracts Though he does not say so, he must have known that Brahmins in ancient India had no particular repugnance for drinks or, for that matter, for meat either However, he never really drank, and as soon as he was in a position to defy his seniors, he asserted his new status by refusing to touch anything stronger than tea or coffee, his favourite drinks His seniors also failed to interest him in "bridge" which he considered a waste of time and energy In short, he was not what Dr Johnson called a "clubbable man "

Sucesss came to him after extreme hard work which has been vividly described in his autobiography At the

end of the first nine and a half months' work, he found that he had earned exactly eleven hundred rupees At the beginning of his career Munshi had also to face a financial crisis Whatever was left of the money he had inherited from his father was invested in the shares of the Specie Bank which went into liquidation in November 1913 Munshi was stranded, for the landed property in Broach brought him very little So, just to meet his monthly expenses, he had to borrow money every month This was repulsive to him and luckily it was not necessary to borrow more than Rs 700/- in all Sometimes he was forced to raise money from his friends to pay the rent of his flat

However he struggled hard He would start from his house at ten o'clock in the morning, read the whole day or listen to important arguments in Court, then wait in his chamber till half-past-six in the evening with the fond expectation of a brief being sent to him by some solicitor Then he would go to Bhulabhai's chamber and wait there patiently till the great man left

For the first year Bhulabhai hardly took any notice of him But gradually he found Munshi to be a useful junior, and entrusted him with various matters, and in a short time Munshi became his family friend This friendship was put to great strain when Bhulabhai left the Home Rule League and wanted Munshi to follow him. But Munshi was not prepared to accept Bhulabhai's lead in politics Ultimately Bhulabhai told Munshi that he would have to leave either the Home Rule League or Bhulabhai's chamber In defiance of Bhulabhai, Munshi went to Delhi to attend the Congress session

When Bhulabhai Desai asked Munshi to leave his Chamber, Jinnah asked him to join his Munshi, however, declined as he thought that it would be in bad form He still maintained good relations with Bhulabhai by going to

his Chamber off and on Fortunately, at this time the Bar Association prohibited the practice of a Senior Counsel accepting as many briefs as he was offered, getting them worked by his devils and taking the fees himself The result was that promising juniors like Munshi began to earn handsome amounts and he remarks "My income for the concluding part of 1922 was enough to send a good Brahmin to the darkest hell"

It is a strange thing in Munshi that he cannot be satisfied with doing only one thing at a time Even while he was preparing for his Advocates' examination, he wrote a short story just to see whether he could write in Gujarati The story called *Mari Kamala* was published in the *Stribodh* in June or July 1912, under the pen name of Ghanasyam Vyas, the nom-de-plume can also stand for Krishna Dvaipayana the author of the *Mahabharata*, and was the original surname of his ancestor before they became Desais and Munshis

All credit goes to Munshi's friend Chandrasankar for inducing him to write *Mari Kamala*, when Munshi was not at all sure of his capabilities as a writer, even after the story was published But it attracted the attention of Narsinhrao a figure to be reckoned with in Gujarati literature Bholanath Divetia, then a great name, came to see the author of *Mari Kamala* and extended to him a hearty welcome to the field of Gujarati literature This gave Munshi the much needed confidence and he wrote the *Verni-Vasulat* in 1913-1914 which took Gujarat by storm

Verni-Vasulat is Munshi's emotional autobiography, but it served another purpose When Munshi settled down to practise at Bombay he found that his minimum expenses would be at least one hundred and twenty rupees a month, and he was earning practically nothing So he contributed the *Verni-Vasulat* as a serial in the weekly *Gujarati* which

brought him about twenty rupees per month, a very welcome addition to his meagre resources He was however mortally afraid lest the old solicitors should come to know that he was writing novels, for, that would at once stamp him as a lazy do-nothing and then he would have to bid good-bye to all hope of ever seeing a brief with his name marked on it So the nom-de-plume of Ghanasyam Vyas was still useful, and Munshi maintained the greatest secrecy Often, as the story came out, even crusty old solicitors discussed amongst themselves the fate of the sweet young heroine Tanman, while all that Munshi could do was to look vacantly on

But the anonymity could not be guarded after the publication of the *Patan-ni-Prabhuta,* his first historical novel, where a Jain monk commits a crime to further the ends of his community This brought the Jains against Ghanasyam Vyas and some young men of the community started talking about taking action against the author They wanted to approach the Government for criminally prosecuting the author under section 153(A) of the Indian Penal Code Munshi was not without friends, and one of them, V M Shah, promised to bear the entire cost of defence But Munshi clearly visualised standing in the dock defending himself in Emperor v Kaniyalal Munshi alias Ghanasyam Vyas, with angry solicitors glaring with righteous indignation at the little traitor who had brought disrepute to the legal profession by writing a novel

Next day Munshi went to Jamiyatram and told him "Kaka, I am in some trouble"

"What is your trouble?"

"Er, I write stories, you know"

"I don't, but I know that you never pay attention to your practice What stories have you written?"

"*Verni-Vasulat*" . . .

Immediately there was a mysterious change in the atmosphere Jamiyatram's tight lips gave away to a look of surprise, then getting over the first shock, with a cheery smile this doyen of the solicitors said softly to Munshi's utter amazement "You have written about Tanman I thought had written it I have read the chapter on Dumas many times"

Thus emboldened Munshi said "But, Kaka, I have also written *Patan-ni-Prabhuta,*" and he related the consequences above mentioned After he ended Jamiyatram assured him "The criminal case is nonsense I think the the papers are with Gulabchand All right, come to the Library to-morrow, we shall see"

Next day at twelve Munshi went to the Library where Jamiyatram ruled the Solicitors' world as an unquestioned monarch The solicitor Gulabchand Damania came and Jamiyatram beckoned him to his side "Gulabchand, come here You know this gentleman, he is Mr Munshi, a very promising young man You have read his story, about Tanman, which I, you and Kabalbhai have discussed so many times"

"Oh yes, certainly A fine book"

"But your Jains are trying to prosecute him, for you see, he has also written *Patan-ni-Prabhuta*"

"Nonsense, they sent me that book There is nothing wrong with it The charge is absurd Don't worry, young man"

The matter ended there but Munshi was outraged when several offers came to him to write for a thousand rupees a novel lauding Kumarpala He replied "I have come to the High Court to earn money With any luck I shall earn my living here God willing, I shall write a novel on Kumarpala but never for money"

Munshi had good reasons to be angry Firstly, as

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee has said "A novel is not history" Particularly this is true of novels based on ancient Indian history, for the paucity of material is such that no story can be created unless the author uses a great deal of imagination Secondly, Munshi had taken very good care to be authentic, and is probably much more careful about history than his boyhood favourite, Dumas In a sense his methods resemble more those of Flaubert, whose *Salambo* is said to have been the result of five years' intensive study of all the available books on the history of Rome and Carthage Munshi had been attracted by the history of Gujarat since his Baroda College days, when he wrote "Graves of Vanished Empires," being inspired by Briggs' *Cities of Gujarat* Since then he had read everything published about the history of Gujarat The history of Gujarat never lost its interest for him, but it is necessary to add that Munshi has never taken a parochial view of Indian history India to him is one and indivisible, and more than any other man he has worked hard to publish an authentic history of India

At the time Munshi wrote his *Patan-ni-Prâbhuta,* he felt that the Gujaratis were not adequately aware of the greatness of their ancestors, and since then he has laboured to awaken the historical consciousness in his countrymen. *Patan-ni-Prabhuta* was the first of a series of historical novels which ended with *Bhagna Paduka* published in 1955. In this he was encouraged by Ranjitram Vavabhai and Haji Muhammad Alarkhia Sivji, the editor of the *Vismi Sadi* in which Munshi's next historical novel, *Gujarat no nath,* appeared month after month, illustrated by the well-known artist Ravishankar Raval. Narasimha Rao who was then the best critic of Gujarat, wrote a Foreward for *Gujarat no nath* in which he compared Munshi to Govardhanram. As a result, Munshi writes, "several friends became dis-

tinctly cool " However, his literary career was launched.

In 1915 Munshi attended the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad at Surat Its secretary, Manoharram Mehta (who was a great friend of Munshi and loyal to him till his death) suggested to him that an association for promoting Gujarati literature should be started At the time Munshi was not sure of himself and declined.

By 1921 Munshi had gained prominence at the Bar, he was also recognised as the leading novelist in the language The idea of starting a literary association and a magazine was discussed between him and Chandrasankar It was then suggested that Munshi should accept the editorship of *Samalochak,* the paper founded by the great novelist Govardhanram Munshi with his business sense agreed to accept the offer only on condition that a joint stock company be started with a capital of Rs 10,000, with himself, Chandrasankar and others as directors Ramaniyaram, the son of Govardhanram, who owned the paper, disapproved of the scheme However, it had the support of Munshi's great friends Manoharram and Manilal Nanavati.

In 1922, the Sahitya Samsad Literary Academy was founded, associated with the Sahitya Prakashak Company, a company with the object of establishing a press publishing a literary magazine Munshi was the head of the institutions, and Narsinghrao Divatia, the great doyen of Gujarati literature, blessed the scheme The *Sahitya Samsad* thereupon began to publish the monthly *Gujarat,* with Munshi as editor For several years this magazine was the most outstanding literary journal in Gujarat and the organ of the Romantic School of Literature of which Munshi was now the leader The object of *Gujarat* was to promote the cultural consciousness of Gujarat and to develop and spread Gujarati literature and culture In 1911 Munshi had coined the word 'asmita'—

Gujarat consciousness—and that became the *mantra* of this new school

A large band of authors of established reputation as well as rising authors followed his lead Among them was Durga Shankar Shastri, Dhansukhlal Mehta, Master Fakir Batubhai Umaredi and Shrimati Lilavati Sheth (as she then was), all prominent names in Gujarati literature

Munshi, as stated before, has developed his life in various compartments This makes the writing of his biography very difficult While he was rapidly rising in the profession, strenuously working for the Home Rule League, writing his novels which gave Gujarat the consciousness of its great historic past, and establishing a school of literature by founding the *Sahitya Samsad*, he was leading a lonely inner life Many of his novels were self revelations, but few knew the inner stress and mental agony from which they sprang He has laid bare this internal tumult and torment in his prose poem *Shishu ane Sakhi*, and later with rare frankness in his autobiography Munshi is egocentric and has the fatal habit of ceaseless self-introspection This brings him internal struggles and often suffering in its wake

His outward life was normally irreproachable in many ways. As soon as he passed the Advocates' examination, he took a flat with three rooms in the same Morarji chawl, brought his mother from Broach and continued the struggle to earn enough to maintain himself Those were dark days The Specie Bank in which the remnant of his patrimony had been invested went into liquidation He had already been suffering from appendicitis for many years and the doctors now advised an operation With some difficulty he borrowed Rs 500 from a generous friend to go to Miraj for the operation by the famous surgeon Dr Wandes But the thought that oppressed Munshi was

not of his safety Most of the cash his father had left had been spent and, even as he was put on the operation table, his thought was of the absolute poverty into which his mother and wife would sink in case he did not survive the operation

By 1918 Munshi was singled out by some solicitors as a promising junior He attracted the attention of some other solicitors on his own merits In that year he got his first fee of Rs 1,100 from which, as he remarks, he bought the first almirah and the first ornament for his wife The same year, Jagdish, his first son, was born The eldest child, Sarala, was then 5 years old Tapibehn was now insistent that as her son was making money he must enlarge the old family mansion

The children also brought the parents closer than they had been before, but Munshi writes about this period

> "Lakshmi was intelligent and cheerful though she spoke little She had little taste for reading She devoted herself, heart and soul, in providing a good home for her husband But she was not interested in his work
>
> "Her love for me knew no limit, but she was like a child who could not express what she felt But I wanted the smartness which modern education gives. I was a fool, hankering after bright conversation, in which I thought I was myself an adept
>
> "By 1918 a great change had come over Lakshmi. (Munshi in his autobiography always refers to her by this name) For this I was responsible to some extent But the main credit goes to her inherent strength of character Money, servants, a cook, a little Europeanised way of living, came in the wake of professional success and she managed everything competently She accompanied Ichchabehen (Mrs.

Bhulabhai Desai) wherever she went and now could hold her own among the wives of my friends But what gave her most pleasure was service to me, nothing else.

"If I was sad, she never asked me the reason, but assumed that she was not able to give me proper attention She never cared for what I was doing, what struggles I was enduring, how much I was earning, what my ideals were When my stories were published, she read them, but they never inspired her with enthusiasm Whenever I wrote, she took care to see that there was ink in the pot and paper on the table and that I was not disturbed by the children

"Our bed room in the new house at Betwadi, to which we had shifted, was stuffy Little Jagdish used to cry every night She would then take him away and play with him for hours lest my sleep be disturbed She was always ready to give up her life for me Thus Lakshmi became an inseparable part of my life"

But Munshi felt that the gulf between them was not sufficiently bridged Deeply conscious that Atilakshmi tried to be an ideal wife, he made every effort to be an ideal husband He had been practising Yoga for a long time One of his favourite verses from the Gita, which he kept before him, was the following —

कर्मेन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसा स्मरन् ।
इन्द्रियार्थान्विमूढात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते ॥

(*Gita* XVIII, v 6)

(He who controls his sense organs but continues to think of the sense objects is a deluded fool and his conduct is hypocritical)

Beauty in all forms has a strange fascination for

Munshi He loves Greek sculpture, and had a postcard of Venus de Milo, framed and hung in his room, even in his days of struggle Whatever, therefore, this verse might mean, to Munshi with beauty gone life was hardly worth living We know from his autobiography that the conflict between the full and rich life and ascetic living, represented by the struggle between hero and heroine, in *Prithvivallabh,* which he considers his best work, was in fact a projection of his own inner struggle Many years later, when Gandhiji read *Prithvivallabh,* which someone recommended to him as a book outstanding for Art's sake, he wrote a strong letter to Munshi, Munshi's reply was that of an artist But that shows the difference between their respective points of view Gandhiji took the verse of the Gita in the literal sense, the urge for beautiful things was controlled in him by a deep sense of what he conceived to be the truth It is impossible to think of Munshi without his main charm, a worship of the beautiful, which for him is the truth

At the same time, Munshi has a streak of asceticism in him and his failure to live up to the austere ideals plunged him in misery After a long struggle, which continued for years, he evolved the doctrine of the individual temperament based largely upon Chapter XVIII of the *Bhagvad-Gita* While practising the *Yogasutra* he came to the conclusion that any austerities against which the individual nature revolts and which do not lead to a sense of self-fulfilment, have to be discarded He also realised that to "be" is nobler and greater than to "do," that unless austerity leads to one becoming oneself, it has no meaning His new conclusion was supported by the following verse of the *Gita* —

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥

(*Gita* XVIII, v 47).

(Better one's own *dharma*, though defective, than the *dharma* of another, well performed If one follows the duty ordained by one's temperament he incurs no sin)

This removed his last doubt Still he felt that he had not yet made his wife a real partner in life So he wrote to her from Mahabaleswar (20-5-1918)

> "I came to Mahabaleswar hoping to resolve many problems of life What those problem are, you have never asked me You have no idea how these have been worrying me I also did not tell you, for fear that you might not understand me Who is responsible for this? You to some extent but mostly I . .. You do not really know me "
>
> Munshi then poured out his heart to her and ended "We came together in 1905 Thirteen years have passed After thirteen years I now know that until I have done my duty by you, I shall be the greatest hypocrite When will you learn to love all that I stand for? When will the day come when you will think like me, share the burden of my life?"

This was, Munshi writes, the last cry for help of a drowning man But when he returned from Mahabaleswar, Atilakshmi welcomed him with an understanding smile There was nothing more to be said Still Munshi confessed to her his weakness and she listened, but she had raised a godly pedestal for him, and no avowal from Munshi could bring him down from there

In 1921, Munshi took his family to Matheran

> "Lakshmi had now become my friend No longer was duty the only link between us I had already given up the idea of ever having a partner of my life who could share my ideals, emotions, and so I was

satisfied " Thus he writes in his autobiography

Tapibehn was happy She had a grandson, her son

had built a new house on the Munshi Heights, and restored the family glory He had also given the community a big feast at Broach Moreover, her son was now happy with her daughter-in-law Every day they went out for a drive and the old lady was content to see them happy

Munshi now felt that writing only novels was not enough if he were to give shape to Gujarat consciousness So he began an elaborate study of the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas,* and the history and literature of Gujarat This study was the source of many of his later works He planned a history of Gujarat Literature in ten volumes which however, resulted years later, only in his *Gujarat and Its Literature* in English He also wrote his first Vedic drama *Purandara-Parajaya* and an elaborate article on the *Date of the Bharata War* The preparations that he made at the time were ultimately embodied in his University Lectures, the *Early Aryans in Gujarat*

The magazine *Gujarat* became very popular and Munshi's utterances and writings acquired an apostolic tone He was the prophet of beauty in literature and life At the end of 1922, Munshi had reached practically the front rank in the profession, and was the most popular author in creative literature of Gujarat and a prophet of new romanticism in the language The *Sahitya Samsad* and the *Gujarat* had become powerful He had reached the top by what he calls the 'steep climb'

And that year he met the lady who was to become Lilavati Munshi

8

LILAVATI

By the end of 1922, Munshi's 'Steep Climb'—the name which he has given to the second part of his autobiography—had been successfully negotiated. With the Raja Bahadur Shivlal Motilal Case, he became a front rank lawyer at the Bombay Bar, his annual income passing the hundred thousand mark He was now the foremost novelist in Gujarati, sharing with the poet Nanalal the premier place among the creative literary artists of Gujarat The *Sahitya Samsad* of which he was the founder-president and the *Gujarat* of which he was the Editor were the expressions of the neo-Romantic literary school, of which he himself was the centre. His domestic life had reached a period of felicitous and harmonious adjustment Into his even tenor of this life of success and happiness entered destiny in the shape of the lady who was to mould his life and give him the elixir for which Munshi had ever thirsted The successful lawyer and author had to pass through four hectic years of suffering and sorrow, and the story of this period proves that life is stranger than fiction

The Vazir Building near the Babulnath Temple, Bombay, which contained the flat occupied by Munshi at the end of 1918, was to be the house of fate Shortly after he moved there, he was one day standing on the balcony of his flat when his friend, Indulal Yajnik, passed by on the road accompanied by a beautiful young lady Yajnik greeted Munshi and introduced him to the lady She was Mrs Lilavati Seth

Munshi had heard of her, for she used to move in the literary circle of Chandrasankar and other friends of

Munshi But this was the first time that they had met Sometime later Lilavati's family moved in and occupied the ground floor flat The same evening she came up to the first floor to meet Munshi and Atilakshmi As a girl she had been fascinated by Tanman, the heroine of Munshi's first novel *Verni Vasulat,* and fervently admired the author of the brilliant novels which followed it She was naturally anxious to become acquainted with him

Thereafter Lilavati sometimes came up to the flat of Munshi of an evening after his return from his chamber Munshi at that time thought little of the intellectual attainments of Gujarati women and was therefore pleasantly surprised when one day this young lady of nineteen discussed Ibsen with him However, he wanted to avoid seeing her as, perhaps out of an instinctive protective dread, he did all women for whom he felt the slightest admiration Anyway, Lilavati soon returned to Ahmedabad

They met again for a few days in 1921 when she returned from a tour of Ceylon Accompanied only by her daughter of six and a tutor, she had travelled, an unusual thing for a young Gujarati lady to have done in those days This impressed Munshi and curiously the old longing for 'Devi', his dream-girl, was revived in him

The first number of the monthly *Gujarat,* founded and edited by Munshi, appeared in March 1922 On April 26, 1922, Lilavati wrote to him requesting that her name be enrolled as a subscriber of the magazine and explaining that she had to write to him since she did not know the address of the *Gujarat* office Munshi sent her a copy of the *Gujarat* and invited her to write something for his journal

The summer vacation of 1922 Munshi was spending at Mahabaleshwar busy writing his historical novel *Raja-*

Lilavati in 1922

dhiraj One day he received from Lilavati some pen pictures including one of himself with a request that they might be published in the *Gujarat*
Munshi was amazed to read

> "He (Munshi) has great capacity for probing the hearts and minds of men But his sparkling intellect is associated with an unconcealed egotism. He judges the world with his intellect Some one remarked that he was proud, I think the remark is correct He mixes with people with the objectivity of a scientist just to analyse their reactions and study their nature Then he merely tabulates his experience without any feeling or emotional reaction For such a man, we can only have respect but cannot develop any attachment .. He is indifferent to the world, for it has denied him something which he hungered for Too proud to complain, he sneers at the world and takes a delight in destructive criticism He shuns sympathy because he thinks it lowers his dignity But deep underneath this hard crust of intellect is hid an undercurrent of love flowing from a heart Someone may have tasted it; but the waters of the spring are not accessible to all "

As Munshi finished reading this thumb-nail sketch of himself, he knew that at last his dream-girl, 'Devi', had come to life He went out alone for a walk in a frenzy. In a moment his life had changed its hue Recalling this mood he wrote in the prose-poem *Shishu ane Sakhi*

"A new hope had entered his life like the first dawn, which with her golden rays dispels the darkness enveloping the world

"He felt as if he were in a dream floating in the air and the stars were dancing to the rhythm of celestial music "

"Next day", Munshi writes in his Autobiography, "I replied to her letter I revised my letter many times and read and re-read it to cut out any unseemly word which I might have included under the stress of emotion. I requested her to write regularly for the *Gujarat* I did not know Lila well then I had no idea of what her home life was but my heart shouted with joy as I felt that at last I had met the girl for whom I had been waiting for ages "

A few months later Lilavati's step-son again rented the ground floor of the Vazir Building and in October she came from Ahmedabad to live there

One evening, after the evening meal Munshi, who had by then shifted to a second floor flat, was reading a brief, when he heard some one singing on the ground-floor. His heart missed a beat "Who is singing?" he asked.

"Lilabehn," replied Atilakshmi

After dinner Lilavati came up to meet them It was of course the most natural thing for a young author to meet the editor of the journal to which she was contributing articles but the mutual attraction was there and they began to talk like old friends

"That night," Munshi writes, "I could not sleep I could foresee the dangerous possibility that lay if this chance acquaintance ripened into friendship An abyss was before me, I was standing on its precipice, and all this just at a time when I had finished the steep climb of my life Thirteen years ago I had buried my 'Devi'—my dream bride Though she had lain buried for years, now she had risen in flesh and blood and come into my life It was for me the beginning of a new life "

Lilavati, generally known among her friends in Gujarat as Lilabehn, was by now no longer an unknown

author The series of thumb-nail sketches, which had for their subject not only Munshi but other leading personalities of Gujarat like Vallabhbhai—he had not yet become 'Sardar'—and Vithalbhai, appearing serially in the *Gujarat*, had taken Gujarat by storm They were characterised by a rare shrewdness and particularly stressed the personal angularities of these well-known people in a piquant and occasionally stinging style To this series Munshi gave the title of *Rekha-chitro* (Pen pictures)

Lilavati was born in 1899 of a well-to-do Jain family of Ahmedabad, the only surviving child of her parents Her mother died when she was only four years old Her father married again, and she was brought up by her maternal grand-parents in Bombay Her grandfather Virchand Dipchand, C I E , one of the early founders of the textile industry in Bombay, left her a small legacy which came in very useful later on for her travels and education Her father died when she was about ten

At the age of eight Lilavati was taken seriously ill, her illness, which lasted for three or four years, forced her to leave school after studying up to the fourth standard However, she attended a Sanskrit Pathshala set up by her grandmother near her house, and acquired a fair knowledge of Sanskrit Her studies, however, were cut short on her being married to a rich widower much against her will From the beginning the marriage was a failure, and Lilavati had to find relief in reading and writing She began to study English and Sanskrit under the guidance of Janubhai Sayed, an experienced and elderly teacher, the nephew of the well-known scholar and litterateur Anand Shankar Dhruv, who was for some time Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Banaras Hindu University She also started writing poems which appeared in various journals between 1916 and 1920.

In 1920 Lilavati visited Kashmir and her travel diaries which were published in a Gujarati magazine were greatly appreciated Next year she took another long trip to the South and also visited Ceylon These travels made her socially conspicuous, for at that time few ladies in Gujarat or elsewhere in India, went on such long journeys in this way, accompanied only by a couple of dependants.

Janubhai Sayed introduced Lilavati, to his friend, Chandrasankar Pandya and some rising literary men In close association with them, she developed her taste for literature, but she really made her mark in Gujarati literature only after the publication of the series of *Rekha-chitro* in Munshi's *Gujarat*

9

LITERARY CAMARADERIE

WHEN in October 1922, Lilavati and her family moved into a flat on the ground-floor of the Vazir Building at Babulnath Road, where Munshi occupied the second floor, a new life began for them Munshi now in love with her understood fully what the word meant

> "My senses suddenly became very keen," he says in his Autobiography "I could hear her voice from wherever she happened to be I could make out her steps on the stairs Many times, I felt that she was coming and she actually arrived I had a feeling that my experience was unique, that none had felt like me before Lila carried fragrance with her The truth was that love had made my senses keener, perhaps super-normal

"By 1922, I had settled down to a happy life after a hard struggle I knew the world for what it was and immediately realised that it was dangerous for me to see the 'Devi' in Lila But I was completely overwhelmed by love "

To obtain a hold over himself Munshi went to Matheran and spent a fortnight there in utter misery The bungalow in which he lived was called 'Dell ' With mordant and malicious humour, he took a piece of chalk and converted the 'D' into 'H '

At Matheran he struggled hard to face what he calls 'the calamity' which had overtaken him Practising Yoga, as he did, he sat three times a day in meditation He searched through the maxims of Patanjali's *Yogasutra* to find a solution Most evenings he sat on a bench on Birdwood Point and tried to analyse himself and so gauge the dominant urges of his life and to determine his future course of action Few people in the throes of such a sudden burst of passion would undergo such a trial, but Munshi has always been different

As a result of this introspection for a fortnight he formed a curious resolution firstly, he would not, under any circumstance, give up his 'Devi' (his dream bride), who, he felt, had materialised in Lilavati, secondly, he would not allow this dream to be vitiated by indulgence as, according to him, its realization depended upon austere self-discipline, thirdly, he would be scrupulously fair to his wife and family, not flinching from his duty to them whatever it might cost him

Munshi was not blind to the conflicting nature of the course which he had prescribed for himself nor to the miseries which it would certainly involve

At this time, Lilavati's flat had become the rendezvous of the literary group to which Munshi belonged Many of

Munshi's friends, Chandrashankar, Mansukhlal Master and others, came to meet Lilavati in the evening, mostly to carry on literary gossip. For some time, Munshi joined this group off and on But he knew what his feelings were and soon ceased to come to these general gatherings. But every evening at about seven-thirty, when he returned from his chamber he would, before going up to his flat, talk for a few minutes with Lilavati and discuss the affairs of the *Gujarat* This developed into a camaraderie, and Lilavati became the unofficial joint editor of the *Gujarat*

This friendly co-operation in literary efforts could not, in view of their mutual feelings, rest at that stage much longer. Lilavati went to a theatre with Munshi and his wife Next morning she sent him a ten rupee note, the price of her ticket for the show which they had gone to see Munshi felt hurt and returned the money. Again, the note came up, it was again sent down After the note had journeyed three or four times, Munshi tore it into pieces and returned them to Lilavati He knew that she always paid for her ticket when she accompanied friends to the theatre but he refused to be placed on their level

In the meantime, the business carried on by Lilavati's husband was going from bad to worse due to his neglect and the vagaries of her step-son Their solicitor came to consult Munshi professionally as to how best he could rescue the business from the mess in which it had been landed It was found that the only way to save the firm was to appoint an efficient person who could control the expenditure Lilavati was thereupon taken on as a partner by her husband and entrusted with the management

One day, in the course of her business activities, Lilavati came with her solicitor to consult Munshi in his chamber When the consultation was over, it was already

evening and she gave Munshi a lift home This was the first time they were by themselves For sometime they talked of their travels, then as they got down at the Hanging Gardens for a walk, their conversation turned to the debatable question as to whether there could be friendship between a man and a woman Those were the days of the suffragette movement and Lilavati contended that men usually looked down upon women and never as their equals

"You seem to be very bitter towards men," Munshi said "I hope no one has treated you badly Has any friendship been broken? You have only to tell me to repair it," Munshi said in a bantering tone

"Lila turned on me like a tigress 'I don't need anyone's help or sympathy,' she said Immediately I realised my stupidity 'I am sorry,' I said For a minute we stood silent, then I began to laugh But in that little minute we came to know each other, without our saying or avowing anything We were transported with joy, as we returned home"

At this time Munshi had to go for a few days to Bhavnagar in connection with his professional work By now it had become a daily routine for him to meet Lilavati as she sat on the verandah of her ground-floor flat for a few minutes in the morning as he left for the court and again in the evening as he returned home

When Munshi was at Bhavnagar there began a correspondence between him and Lilavati which extended without a break for over three years Sometimes three letters and notes were exhanged in a day, sometimes a long letter covered the events of three or four days They continued to be written even when they were in Bombay living in the same house and even if they met for some time during the day.

Writing in his Autobiography about these letters, Munshi says

> "We only moved as automatons of correct conduct in the world of reality We really lived in and through these letters They recorded our struggles to become one in spirit
>
> "In this way, like birds of the springtide of love, we wafted in the sky of our imagination 'These letters expressed the joy and anguish of our undivided soul There we sang without restraint, not for others to hear but for the sheer joy of singing "

Quotations from many of these letters have been published by Munshi in the third volume of his Autobiography, *Swapnasiddhi ni Shodhma* (In Search of Dream-Realization) The letters are significant, they reflect the passing mood of the writers, sometimes gay, sometimes witty, and at others sad, but usually with the buoyancy of hearts aflame with love Some of these letters discuss contemporary literature or events, sometimes an incident which happened in the High Court is described, while in others a doubt as to the future creeps in But written by two competent literary craftsmen, the letters rank among the great epistles of literature

But I think that the publication of many of them is even more significant than their composition Munshi may have his faults (who hasn't), but he is no hypocrite As a matter of fact, he is always eager to appear just as he is, no more and no less, sometimes at considerable cost to himself

At the beginning of the third volume of his Autobiography he quotes from Aeschylus

"Willingly, willingly I did it
Never will I deny the deed."

The letters are offered not as the justification of his

conduct, but as constituting the avowal of his inner life. They were published at the height of his career when few remembered that he had once made love to a married woman But that is exactly the reason which prompted him to publish these letters he did not want to appear except as he was Nowhere in his Autobiography has he attempted to explain away his conduct more than once he mentions that he had a loving wife,—whom he always refers to with deep respect as the *sati*,—children and a position in society In his *Bhagavad-Gita and Modern Life* (p 163) he writes —

"In 1922 I fell out of love with my dream-bride and fell in love with a living woman A new and terrible problem faced us A binding, maddening attraction drew us to each other Why we did not follow the normal way is more than I can explain. But at this distance of time I can venture an analysis

"When I fell in love, I thought that my dream-bride had materialised A vision of ineffable beauty stood before me Both of us were fascinated, hypnotised by a dream in iridescent beauty But we had a horror of the ways which led to satiety We dared not destroy the vision which enveloped us so wondrously We felt that we had one soul which was shared between us We felt ourselves inspired and driven by the Undivided Soul This idea, this fancy if you so choose to call it, 'indwelt' us, and kept us superior to indulgence With elated minds we ventured to dream of our unity, despite insuperable obstacles which stood between us But our determination to ban earthiness tortured our souls and drove the mighty flood into a rolling *Mandakini* of exquisite yearning

"This intensive 'indwelling' of the Undivided Soul in two persons brought about a gigantic wave of creativeness in us We escaped sordidness, waste and satiety Our creative art blossomed into a springtime of richness New ideas, new experiences, new ambitions came upon us I wrote my best works then I conducted my cases then as never before My power appeared to be magnified a million-fold We roamed through Europe like little children bursting with vitality This tremendous creative energy was the result of transmuting the sex urge into creative vigour"

At this time Munshi developed his doctrine of the Undivided Soul In a letter to Lilavati in 1922 (December 16) he wrote

"The high-priestess (Lilavati) and her admirers may look askance at the idea of submerging her individuality in another But there are occasions in life when one develops such personal relationship with an individual that to lose one's own identity or individuality with the object of love comes as a bliss Our personality and pride are the protecting armour to fight the battle of life, but if we carry it inside our homes we shall only transform them into a battle-field When two individuals lose their identities and are united, then only can they project their joint-self in all its splendour and lay the foundation of a perfect friendship"

About this time Munshi described the emotional upheaval through which he was passing in a poignant and moving letter which he wrote to his friend Acharya On learning from Munshi about his meeting and love for Lilavati, Acharya warned Munshi of the dangerous potentialities of this romance In his reply Munshi laid bare his

very soul and with characteristic forthrightness answered his critics and traducers

"As was my habit, I have informed you that a new factor has entered my life I also begged of you to extend to me that sympathy which helped me to conquer the distress of my heart in 1905 But it is clear from your letter that the harmony which existed between us is now broken

"Don't think for a moment that I have ceased to be straightforward I am analysing myself in a manner which even you cannot do Assuming that your analysis of my state of mind is correct, so what? A truth and an overwhelming truth faces me It is in-dwelling me What is to be done about it? I cannot follow your advice and suppress it You think that it will assume a sordid form That is impossible I can only make it my own, in my own way, though the way may be very peculiar There are twin strings to my heart one of love, the other of reverence Others may not be aware of the fact, but you know it well On some days the two strings play in resonance, I hear their sweet music, and if ever I cease to hear this music, then this relationship between us would lose its beauty

"I have wasted years in pining for it (the resonance) Without it I would not have worshipped a mere childhood memory with such unshaken faith.

"To-day, I am in the grip of the same impulse (to hear the music) It has inspired me to (offer) worship once again. If this impulse had only been on my side, I would have maintained silence But she shares it as intensely as I do

"It is possible that I am only dreaming, that what you say is true It is likely that the other

individual is only playing with me, that she may be heartless and ambitious But I know what my heart feels about the relationship If I give her up, my life would lose its purpose and it would be a living death Shall I be untrue to the very law of my being?

"I only demand justice from you You are right in a way I am a man, she is a woman But we have not exchanged a single syllable which friends may not exchange with self-respect and pride The contemptible world of the Philistines has only one view of things- 'If a man and woman cannot satisfy their animal cravings, they should not be friends ' Should I accept its judgment, become a knave and poison two lives?

"I know very well that the end of this adventure is bound to be tragic I also know that when the other side outgrows the glamour of my scintillating personality, she will no longer remain in her present state of mind

"But what then? Should I make a desert of my life? It would be the height of folly If I suppress this ideal, my life would be a torment for years. If I do not suppress it and my dream continues, I will realise what has eluded me for so many years I shall then be able to work better My vision will grow wider, my zest for life greater and my life richer"

10

PARVATI AND GANGA

WHILE Munshi was conducting the case at Bhavnagar, he was invited to halt at Ahmedabad on his way back, as the affairs of Lalbhai, Lilavati's husband, had become involved in further difficulties and his advice was absolutely necessary But before going to Ahmedabad, Munshi took the opportunity of visiting the important historical sites of Kathiawad, now Saurashtra, of which he had written, but had never had a glimpse before

First he went to Junagadh which he had described vividly in the *Gujrat no Nath,* but which he now saw for the first time From Junagadh he went to Prabhas, to see Dehotsarga and Somnath This visit made a lasting impression on him At Junagadh he saw the famous Sudarshana Lake inscription of Asoka, Rudradaman and Skandagupta a vision of the past greatness of his country flashed before his eyes Somnath and Dehotsarga, however, were bitter reminders of her downfall The great temple of the Chaulukya Emperors, or what was left of it, was being used by a Muslim police officer as a stable What was once the *sanctum sanctorum* of the greatest Siva temple in India was sacriligously filled with the stench of dung The sacred Dehotsarga where Sri Krishna is believed to have given up his mortal life was even worse Not a vestige of the shrine, which had stood on this spot remained, in spite of all-India protests. By the order of the Nawab of Junagadh the temple which stood had been closed and the frightened Hindus had not the courage to have the temple repaired or reopened

This was in January 1923 A quarter of a century was to elapse before Munshi was to be instrumental in

restoring the sacred shrines of Somnath and Dehotsarga For the time being, he boarded the train for Ahmedabad with a heavy heart

By the time Munshi arrived at Ahmedabad he had had a fornight's correspondence with Lilavati and it was clear to both that their attitude to each other had gone far beyond mere friendship

For about two days Munshi remained at Ahmedabad as the guest of Lilavati Here for the first time he saw the heroic struggle she was making up against her lonely and miserable life, Munshi has poignantly described it in his Autobiography

On the evening of December 29, he went out for a walk with Lilavati As they walked, he told her for the first time what had been in his mind

"Last night I came to a decision To-day is my birthday * I must talk to you frankly If we continue to drift in our relationship as we are doing without mutual understanding, it will lead to misery We have already become the victims of scandal At the same time our friendship is growing more intimate We should, therefore, decide whether this friendship is an inalienable element in our lives or just a mutually inspiring contact "

"My life is dreary I am alone and helpless," replied Lilavati "Your friendship is all I have I am prepared to suffer anything for it in this life and in the next I am not afraid of what others say "

"But my career is likely to be ruined," Munshi said

"I cannot say whether such a risk is worth running Whatever the consequences, I shall always remain the same "

"It is not the question of risk I have had a vision

* At this time Munshi was under the impression that his birthday, according to the English calendar, was December 29

of our Undivided Soul. My life can find fulfilment only on its being realized, and I am resolved to realise it even if I were to die in the effort. But have you faith in our Undivided Soul? Will you be able to bear its burden?"

"I have no faith in the Undivided Soul. But I have faith in you, that is why I have faith in it," said Lilavati frankly.

"But I am an odd mixture of an idealist and a realist. If we have to realise the Undivided Soul, we shall have to go through austere self-control to attain it."

"What do you mean by austere self-control?"

"Lakshmi has been my true and life-long comrade. I respect her and am deeply attached to her. I owe her a deep debt of gratitude. I love my children. We cannot raise the fabric of our happiness on their misery. This will involve very severe *tapascharya*."

"Where is the question of *tapascharya* in that?" asked Lilavati.

"If we are to remain pure, there is only one way for us. We should not do anything without taking Lakshmi into confidence. This would be a *tapas*, our idealism would be tried on the touch-stone of duty. So I have wired Lakshmi to come to Baroda. I want to tell her everything frankly. I will show her our letters. We will maintain our friendship only if she permits. All of us will go to Europe together if she cheerfully agrees. But if she does not, you will have to leave Bombay. I shall do my duty even with a broken heart. Then will begin the *tapas* of the Undivided Soul, living away from each other."

Lilavati was silent for a while. She was also on trial. "Please tell Atilakshmibehn everything, and tell her also that she need have no fear," she said. "I don't want anything that is hers. If she will only let me have what she hasn't received and will not receive, I shall be content."

I have taken this and the following dialogues from Munshi's Autobiography There he candidly remarks that this conversation seems as though it were taken from a novel, but he adds that at that time with his imagination on fire he was living the life of a character in a romance

His stay in Ahmedabad over, Munshi started for Broach, on the way Atilakshmi joined him at Baroda Alone in the railway compartment, Munshi told Atilakshmi everything, of his hankering after the "Devi", or the dream-girl since childhood, of how he saw the "Devi" in Lilavati, of his resolution at Matheran, of the letters between him and Lilavati and the pledge taken by them both on the banks of the Sabarmati at Ahmedabad He gave Atilakshmi the letter from Lilavati With tears in his eyes, he begged her pardon and said

"What I have just now confessed to you, I know, is unforgivable In a sense it is my degradation, in a sense it is my salvation But I beg of you, please do not consider me at all Do not think of my happiness You must decide for yourself If you say 'no', I shall be unhappy; neither shall I be happy if you say 'yes' Love has come (as the God of Fire) demanding my sacrificial offering He is sure to consume me Read these letters Think over the matter for two days Then let me know your decision "

On the third day Atilakshmi came to him and said "I have thought over the matter very carefully I have always surrendered myself to you completely You have given me all that you could You cannot give me any more, for I am not capable of taking or receiving any more. You should both remain friends Your sense of incompleteness will then disappear Three of us will go to Europe I have complete confidence in you "

Munshi admits that he felt himself contemptible before this noble lady To Lilavati he wrote: "After

belongs to all, Krishna belongs to all, then who is mine?" (30 1 23)

In another letter she wrote·

"Believe me, I have dedicated my life to the worship of you, and you alone Do what you want, go wherever you like, but please let me comfort you once a day . I have become like Jada-Bharat * No longer do I care for happiness nor am I worried about misery You should not feel sad on my account Only one thing I beg of you if you have any pity for me, please look after your health My heart sinks when I see that you are feeling miserable I do not want to share your happiness, but do not worry about making me happy I shall be happy when I see you happy Love for you has sustained me till now, it will sustain me hereafter

"To express how I feel I have written so much. You are kind, so you will excuse me When you have recovered your health, I shall be happy Pay forgive"

For some months Munshi and Atilakshmi had been planning a trip to Europe For some time before they met, Lilavati had also been making preparations for going to Europe Mansukhlal Master, who took a parental interest in Lilavati, had suggested, before Munshi went to Bhavnagar, that she should accompany the Munshis Munshi had not liked the idea at first, but when Atilakshmi agreed to it, it was decided that Lilavati would accompany them

Atilakshmi might have felt, as Munshi writes, that by the time they had finished the trip, Munshi would be rid of his infatuation and everything would be as it was.

* A mythological character A great sage once loved a deer To expiate this worldly attachment he was reborn as an idiot

before, Munshi also had much the same idea So all of them plunged with enthusiasm into the preparations for the journey, though, as his letters show, Munshi was feeling the mental and bodily strain of keeping to the strange resolves he had made

Though Lilavati was accompanying the Munshis on their journey, she was going on her own account and she naturally thought she was going independently Munshi found this attitude rather disagreeable, used as he was from boyhood to order everyone about him So he arranged the trip just as it suited him in spite of frequent protests from Lilavati, but when he left out Germany from her itinerary, apparently without consulting her, she reacted vehemently Munshi therefore sent her the following letter

> "Usually Germany comes last, but whatever it is, why should it upset you so much You are free to stay as long as you like and go wherever you like There is nothing to prevent you from going to hell should it be to your liking You are not being obstructed in any way, so an exhibition of your temper does not seem to be called for" (25 1 1923)

Apparently, Lilavati had to give in with a good grace, a process which she must have soon found out was necessary if she were to retain the affection of this impetuous man However, two days later, Munshi was writing to her

> "Atilakshmi has gone to Broach this morning She has developed a keen desire for going to Europe, naturally, therefore, petrol and money are being consumed at an unbelievable rate If God wanted people to live within their means, why did He create women?
>
> "Today I am going to Cook's to finalise our programme I wish we could follow the American

system I am making arrangements in such a way that you can go anywhere you like, if you want to I hope you will thus be free from interference, and would have no reason to change your plans

"You should ask Lakshmi how we are dreaming of this trip She has now opened out Our life is now so beautiful that most people envy us Our trip to Europe will cause even more heart-burning "

The last was an allusion to the scandal-mongers who were very busy with their names Their world had started a hunt for them

It was at this time that Deshbandhu C R Das came to Bombay to consult Jinnah about forming a new party composed of the old guards of the Home Rule League Munshi as a trusted lieutenant of Jinnah was present throughout these meetings Munshi also talked with A Rangaswami Aiyengar and S Satyamurti about this new party, as usual keeping Lilavati posted every day as to what was going on In one of her replies she ended —

"My heart was cold, my eyes were tired,
I could not think but of one thing,
I waited and waited to see you passing by
And to bless the day if I could catch your eye
I saw you passing by,
But your eye I could not catch
And you do not know what this meant to me "

Luckily for Munshi he was not forced to make any choice though for personal reasons he had no idea of returning to politics In the course of the Das-Jinnah talks, Jinnah insisted that if a parliamentary party were to be started, Gandhiji should have nothing to do with it He adhered to his view that Gandhiji's direct action was prejudicial to the country and he would not be associated with the party if Gandhiji was in it Deshbandhu, however, was strong-

ly of the view that the country would not tolerate any party which was antagonistic to Gandhiji. The discussion, therefore, proved fruitless.

11

THE UNFOLDING TRAGEDY

On March 2, 1923, Munshi, Atilakshmi and Lilavati left for Europe and returned on June 6. They visited Italy, Switzerland, France and England. Until they reached Paris all of them were in high spirits, but there they met some friends from Bombay, who gave them news of the children. Atilakshmi began to feel homesick. Another fear was gnawing at her heart: she had felt, as Munshi writes, that after knowing Lilavati a little better, he would grow weary of her, and that coming to know him better, Lilavati, her sturdy independence thwarted by the domineering Munshi, would grow cool towards him. One night, at Paris, Atilakshmi, who could never bring herself to discuss such things, worked out an adaptation of an old Gujarati song which exactly described her feelings. This she showed her husband, and they wept together at the curious fate which had overtaken them. "I spent the night in her arms, and she in mine, each trying to save the other from drowning," Munshi writes.

In England, Lilavati wanted to get admitted to a college for further studies, though Munshi was against the idea, for he felt that it would snap their literary partnership and would not be in keeping with his ideas of the Undivided Soul. But fate again stepped in. While they were discussing this matter, Lilavati received an urgent

cable from her husband requesting her to return immediately, as his business was in a state of collapse She had, therefore, to give up the idea of staying in England

Munshi writes

> "The eternal triangle continued Blinded by love I thought that I could follow the precepts of the *Yogasutra* and resolve this triangle of forces by making them parallel in a way that no one had ever succeeded in doing It was folly At that time I felt that I would be able to confine love within the limits of literary-partnership and imaginary unity of spirit and keep it apart from my domestic life which would continue undisturbed "

After returning from Europe, Munshi's hope of continuing his peaceful domestic life was dashed to the ground Atilakshmi never complained, but his efforts to make her happy did not succeed

Munshi could not help writing letters to Lilavati every day

Munshi is right in counting some of these letters amongst his best writings, for they were the living, vibrant outpourings of his heart While reading these letters it takes some effort to remember that the author was an eminent counsel of the highly competitive Bombay bar, and also a successful organiser conducting a monthly magazine and a press, leading the Gujarat Sahitya Samsad and later the Parishad to literary triumphs They were both living in the same building, so he could have met her any time he wanted, still they went on exchanging letters Munshi is not by nature so shy as to take recourse to writing what he did not have the courage to say The only explanation possible is that he was really addressing these letters to his dream-girl, if he actually talked to her of love, the whole idea of the dream-girl which he had cherish-

Munshi, Atilakshmi and Lilavati in England (1923)

ed since he was a child of five would have been shattered. The fact that the dream-girl whom he was addressing was a married woman did not disturb his picture

When he was a student, the sight of a postman in the street gave him hopes that at last a letter from the dream-girl had arrived. Now at last she was writing to him what did it matter if he was now married and had four children and she, a married woman with a daughter The hope of a life-time, which he had once given up as an unattainable bliss, had at last arrived, he would enjoy it while it lasted, even if like some insidious narcotic his intoxicating impulse was leading him to a slow agonising death This correspondence also had become a part of his life and it was impossible for him to give it up even had he entertained such an idea As he says, these letters had become the very breath of his life

He describes these days faithfully in his Autobiography, taking all the responsibility on himself

> "Lakshmi knew that my conscience was pure but I had no control over my mind I had so to regulate my life that I would often be left alone At such times she would come and meekly request me 'You are not feeling well You are ill, so please go with Lilabehn for a drive ' Sometimes I felt like taking advantage of her generosity But I could not bear the relentless stoicism with which this devoted wife, the *Sati*, was sacrificing herself Her sublime self-surrender brought tears to my eyes I would then refuse to go out for drive unless she too came
>
> "When I was young, I sometimes felt that if Lakshmi, even once in a while, crossed me or refused to obey me, if she became jealous or quarrelled with me and made me miserable, our relations would be more human But Lakshmi never swerved from the

highest pedestal of *bhakta* She never complained; if ever she felt jealous or angry, she never showed any signs of being so She became the living embodiment of *charana-raja*, the dust of my feet

"If my head began to ache, or if there was pain in my chest, and I happened to place my hand on the spot, she would immediately ask me 'Is something hurting you? Have you a head-ache?' and tears would spring to her eyes Then immediately I would have to exercise self-control, assume the cheeriest smile at my command and assure her that I was perfectly all right If she came to my drawing room while I was reading a brief, she would just stand silently by my side and look at me with longing, pathetic eyes, and I would feel that look like a whiplash If at dinner she offered me something and I declined it, a wave of pain would pass over her face, and I would shudder

"By nature I am impatient and quick-tempered, even on the slightest provocation, I would beetle my brows, I always found it difficult to control this exhibition Lakshmi, all her life, was used to such mannerisms and never worried about them Now, if I did anything of the kind, she would burst into tears and I would feel someone sawing my entrails

"As a result, I could not complain, I could not cry, I could not let myself go I would try to be very, very careful But something or other would surely happen one day I would then beg her to forgive me This made her sadder still How can one forgive one's deity? I was her God

"Sometimes neighbours came and told her 'Atibehn, it is impossible to hear what they are

saying about Lilabehn and Munshibhai’ ‘Why then do you listen?’ she would retort

“We wanted to make each other happy, but the result was that both of us were plunged into misery. .

“It is impossible to describe how wretched the three of us felt, but it was I who felt it most acutely To express whatever I think or feel is the first law of my nature But before whom to unburden my sorrow? Love and the *Gita*, the struggle between passion and duty, my baffling effort to lighten the sorrow of two loving women, my incessant struggle to make them happy, all these nearly drove me mad When I was with Lila, the eyes of Lakshmi expecting my return haunted me, talking with Lakshmi I would begin to think of Lila I had read enough of ‘eternal triangles’, but never could I imagine one like this A boa-constrictor was crushing the three of us in its remorseless coil None of us could freely go near the other, nor stay away Lila and I gave vent to our furious pent up passion in our letters But Lakshmi! She always stood before us like an image of forbearance hewn out of frozen tears ”

All this time Tapibehn was at Broach, looking after the construction of the new house In October 1923, Atilakshmi and the children went to see her

The constant mental strain was telling on Munshi’s health Every morning he would get up with a feeling of exhaustion and a heavy dull ache in his head However, he had to go through his briefs and conduct cases in the Courts On his way down to the car he would see Lilavati on her verandah, she would come out to meet him and, along with the papers for the *Gujarat*, slip into his hand a letter, which Munshi would read as he drove to the

Court. From eleven to five, his cases occupied him, then he would be busy in his Chamber with conferences with solicitors, the manager of the press or some young writer. Atilakshmi would come to the Chamber to call for him at half-past-seven. Quarter-to-eight found him in Lilavati's drawing room, busy over the affairs of the *Gujarat,* talking with some artist or writer. As he came out, he would slip his letter in her hand and with a sigh climb the stairs.

This could not go on for long. The pain in Munshi's head gradually increased. The night before Atilakshmi left for Broach, Munshi could not sleep. The day after she left, he felt feverish. As he returned from the Court, he collapsed with high fever.

For two days Lilavati, Manukaka and Shankarlal nursed him, on the third day Tapibehn and Atilakshmi returned to Bombay. As soon as he got rid of the fever, he took them to Matheran.

While at Matheran, mother and son had a frank talk. Tapibehn, living at Broach, had heard all sorts of rumours: how her son was wasting money after gay pursuits, how he was lavishing gifts on Lilavati, how he was not helping his sister and her children. It was not proper, she admonished him.

Munshi felt deeply hurt. First, he rendered her a complete account of his earnings and expenditure. As a matter of fact, all the accounts were kept by Atilakshmi herself with the help of a clerk, for, in spite of his large income, Munshi has never reconciled himself to looking after his own financial affairs, he would look after everybody else's, but not his own. He told his mother, how his sister, brother-in-law and their children, who were living with him, were being looked after, and the latter's educacation provided.

Then Munshi told her about his relations with Lila-

vati from the very beginning He still remembers what he then told his mother "Ba," he said, "What shall I do? If I give up Lila, I will not be able to live If I forsake Lakshmi, remorse will drive me to death Like a fool, I had thought that Lila would be my partner in literary efforts and Lakshmi, in my life, and that like Mahadevji, I shall live happily with both Parvati and Ganga But now I know that my life has been poisoned Love comes to all as an exciting joy, a pleasant experience To me, however, it has come in a form worse than death It has come scorching everything with its pestilential breath, destroying my peace and happiness "

Next day (29-10-23) he received a letter from Lilavati full of hope This had, curiously enough, a depressing effect on Munshi He replied "I had a peculiar dream night before last I could not sleep I was sad and had a head-ache I dreamt that we had gone to Andheri in the car For a time we followed a glow-worm on the road to Andheri Then we sat down on the road Do you remember the last act of the *Hernani*. When people came in search of us, two corpses were found lying on the road Then Undivided Soul had reached the Infinite " This idea developed a little later, and a suicide pact appears to have been discussed and given up

Ultimately as the torture became unbearable, Munshi decided to efface himself from society He resolved to give up worldly life and retire to Malsar near Chandod on the Narmada In his college days he had once been there, and had a vivid memory of its peaceful atmosphere and the sonorous peal of the temple bells which seemed to call him But Atilakshmi was in a delicate state of health, so Munshi decided to postpone his departure till her confinement was over

In the meantime, he made preparations to renounce

the world He drafted a trust deed on December 28, settling whatever he had on his wife and children This was at Broach where he had followed Atilakshmi and the children to celebrate his birthday On their return to Bombay, Munshi re-drafted the trust deed, but was careful not to mention anything to Atilakshmi But she had a premonition and could not even bear to see him out of sight In February, she gave birth to a still-born child, this was followed by puerperal fever, the best physicians of Bombay could render no help She died a week later

When Atilakshmi died, Munshi was broken-hearted When looking through her papers, he found one, to which Munshi refers in the following terms

> "She left a curious message for me During our visit to Europe, or sometime thereafter, she had poured out her heart on paper and kept it with the flowers which I had gathered from Shelley's tomb and given her This message ran
>
> " 'Beloved Sea, You brought me to your shores and calmed my rushing heart At the same time, you rendered me helpless, broke my strength Beloved, did you not consider even for a moment what tribulations I had to undergo in being born so that I may be yours? I had to break through the mountain to come out He dashed me to ground But I did not care for it, and ran to come to you as fast as I could Rushing forward to meet you, I uprooted trees that came in my way I even destroyed their flowers I even killed the human beings who crossed my path I brushed aside whoever came in my way and came to you But, O King of the Seas, you remained unmoved You did not shower on me even one of your surging waves If you had sent towards me but one caressing wave, I would have remained

happy in its memory Beloved, did you want to test me?"

"God! Who was I so earthy to test her? This, the purest of *satis* invited the test herself

'If I have always worshipped Rama by thought, deed and word, O Mother Earth, open up and receive me'

"These words were spoken not only by Sita, they were proclaimed through the life of a woman of this materialistic iron age

"When I think of her loyalty, my heart is stirred by deepest reverence I never came across such a wonderful example of self-surrender

"Fate has a crude and ruthless sense of humour Oh God! when I read this touching letter, I felt as if my heart was breaking I spent a life-time in thinking of 'Devi' But she, in whom I could never see the 'Devi' became a Devi in fact by her sublime self-immolation Lakshmi gave me everything, I gave her everything but love This I could not give her But ever-thirsting for it, she lived She gave me the gift of life and left Oh God, why I was made so?

"Of the three noble women who shaped my life, she was by far the noblest She lived but for me, she died with my name on her lips Dying, she gave me a new life"

12

SELF-APPOINTED OUTLAWS

At the age of thirty-six, Munshi was left with four children to look after Tapibehn was old To add to his misery, proposals for marriage started coming in Munshi naturally refused them with as much grace as he could muster

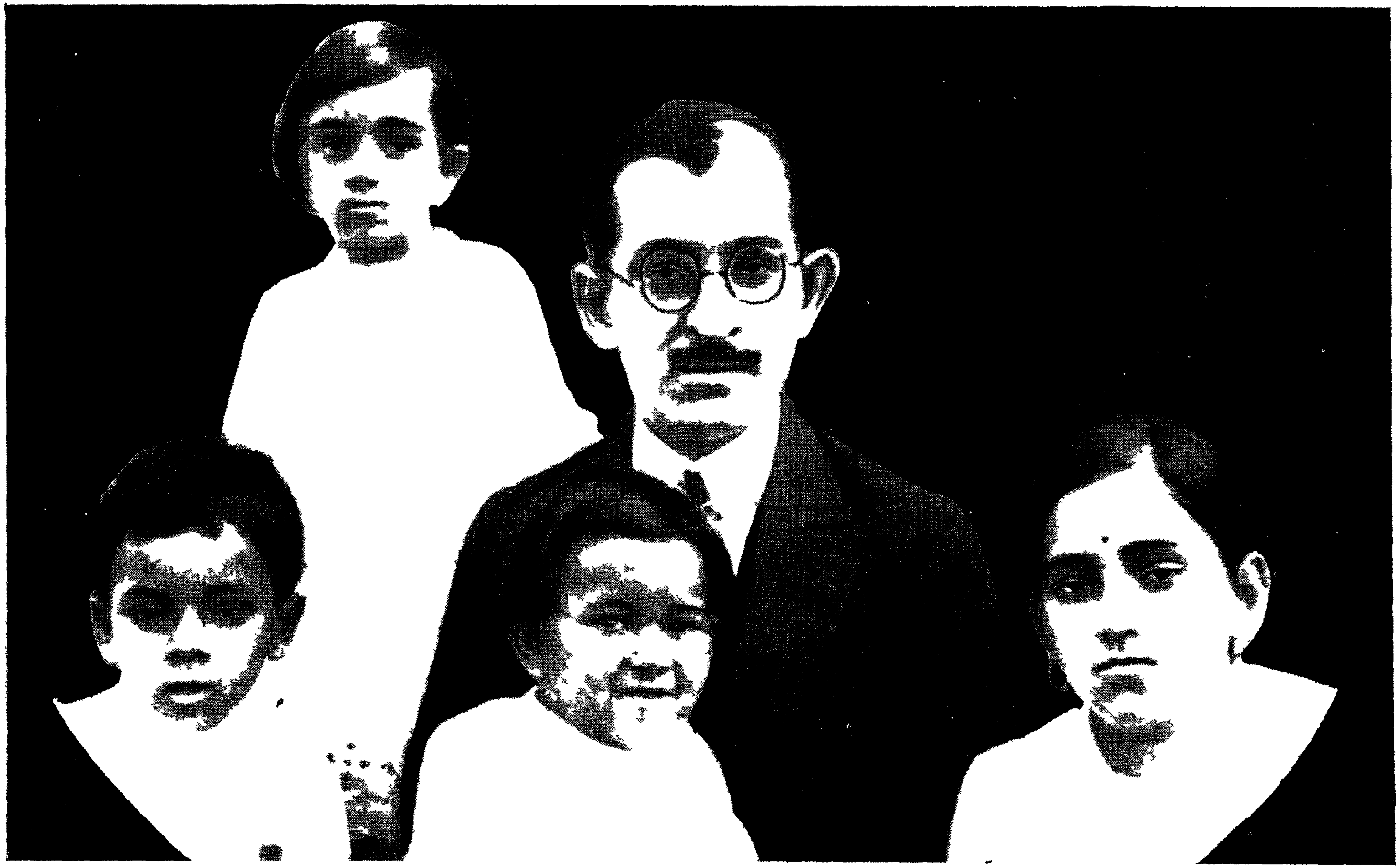
By the end of April, Munshi took his mother and children to Mahabaleshwar Soon after Lilavati went to Panchgani to have her daughter, Bala, admitted to a residential school From Panchgani they came to Mahabaleshwar and for a time she took the care of Munshi's children off the shoulders of Tapibehn

At this time Lilavati was in great difficulties Her husband's business, once very flourishing, was on the verge of insolvency She did not want any money from him for herself, but wanted him to provide for the education of their daughter, Bala

One day after her return to Bombay, she told him frankly that unless he provided for Bala, by settling some property on her, she would not give him the key of the safe deposit vault He replied "I shall order the *darwan* to force you to give up the keys " The manager, Shankarprasad, was there. He ran to Munshi and said that the Seth was very angry and might do anything, so would Munshi please induce Lilavati to give up the key

Munshi called her up to his flat and requested her to give the keys to her husband, as for Bala, he promised that either he would get her father to settle some property on her in trust, or would provide for her himself "You are taking care of my children, why shouldn't I do the same for yours," he said

She threw away the key but immediately decided to



Munshi family, 1924

move out of her husband's house. All these years she had agreed to live in the house for the sake of his social prestige, but only on one understanding, that her dignity and independence were respected, otherwise she would have joined the Gandhi-Ashram eight years ago. However, he had now gone back on his words and had insulted her by threatening that he would let loose his *darwan* on her. So she left the house, decided not to return there again.

Munshi was now faced with the new problem of finding a suitable residence for Lilavati. Some of his friends refused to give her asylum. They were afraid of jeopardising their social standing by helping a woman who had left her husband's house. Ultimately, a kind friend who looked on Lilavati as a sister let her the ground floor of his bungalow at Santa Cruz. She moved there on the next day alone. Her husband would not allow her daughter to go with her.

Money was the next problem. She had never accepted any money for herself from her husband, and she would not take anything from Munshi either. She firmly clung to her independence inspite of all Munshi's entreaties to be allowed to help her. Ultimately she agreed to accept the paid post of Assistant Editor of the *Gujarat*. From the next day she began to attend the *Gujarat* office from eleven to five.

One intimate friend advised Munshi: "Munshi, it is not sufficient to be moral, it is necessary to be so circumspect that society accepts you as such. You are ruining your reputation."

Munshi retorted: "What is society? One of our friends every evening gets down at Gamdevi (near the red light district of Bombay) and returns home at ten. Another respectable gentleman, happily married, has presented a bungalow to a certain lady. Please do not judge me

by these standards Here is a lady whom I respect, I am not ashamed to tell the world of my relations with her, I do not want to hide them"

Rumours reached the ears of Munshi that Lilavati's family was planning to remove her by force from her house at Santa Cruz and take her away to Ahmedabad or somewhere else where she would be kept in seclusion This caused serious anxiety to Munshi and Lilavati As a last resort Munshi arranged that she should join the Convent School at Panchgani, a hill station near Bombay, where, at any rate, she would be immune from such attentions

Munshi and Lilavati were now planning their future They had no intention to plan a life without each other, nor was there any prospect of their being free to marry for years and years, if both happened to live so long They therefore, made an elaborate plan according to which Lilavati was to pass her Cambridge School Certificate Examination, proceed to England, qualify for the Bar, and practise at the Original Side Bar where Munshi was now a leading Counsel

During all this time Tapibehn, now in Bombay, was watching her son's interest with an anxious eye Atilakshmi's young children were not keeping well in Bombay Tapibehn, therefore, decided that they should take a house at Panchgani where she would live with her grandchildren Lilavati would also live with them and continue with her studies

Early in 1925, a house was rented at Panchgani and Tapibehn and the children shifted there Lilavati, now studying at the Convent, also came to live with them There is little doubt that behind Tapibehn's generous decision to give a happy asylum to Lilavati there was also the intention of rubbing off her angularities and making her a fit wife for her son whenever that event occurred

Though they were planning for an inchoate future, it was also Munshi's intention that Lilavati should be a mother to his children. He therefore desired that she and the little children should come together. In his letters, therefore, he often instructed her how to look after this or that child, how to satisfy the fancy of one or the other child. And when Munshi came to Panchgani almost every week-end—Bombay to Panchgani is rather a strenous journey—he found to his satisfaction that they were all living as a happy family. The result of this experiment was unique. For in the Munshi family there is a complete absence of those mental barriers that separate children of different parents.

> "Whenever I went to Panchgani", writes Munshi, "mother would place Lila at the head of the table and ask her to prepare the menu. All of us then would go out together for walks. After dinner, mother would sit down with her *pan*. The children would dance and sing the *garba*. Lila would play on the harmonium and I on the tabla. Sometimes I sang my old favourite songs and Lila accompanied me on the harmonium. Mother would take an active interest and say, 'Lilabehn, now sing some of Mirabai's Bhajans. Bhai likes them.'
>
> "Mother arranged our affairs with wonderful tact. She took care to see that her son did not slip from the path of strict rectitude. She not only lived for him; she was the guardian-goddess presiding over his life. 'Bhai, how long can you continue like this?' mother would sometimes ask. 'So long as it is His will,' I would reply.
>
> "My idealism however helped me. I have a firm belief that ideals can be realised only when we do not seek satiety. This conviction came to my help

If I lowered myself, I felt the ideal for which I was living would be shattered, the day-dreams of 'Devi' would fall to pieces But the 'Devi' had complete hold over me and I could never ignore her "

Munshi was particularly solicitous about his mother and children In a letter to Lilavati (29-3-25) he writes

"I have received both your letters Do not hesitate to assist mother in every way you can Write to me whatever you feel about it, there is nothing wrong in that But in no event should you wound my mother's susceptibilities You should accommodate yourself to her She has done so much for me that her slightest wish should be respected I am constantly thinking about the children You should not neglect your health, at the same time you must see that the children do not cease to love you Today I was thinking how the colour of my life has changed since you came into it Mother is happy and peaceful The children are receiving proper education I am deep in the study of literature and 'Miss Inspiration,' is progressing all round—English, French, piano, belles-lettres, badminton, table-tennis, and domestic work, etc I have a feeling that at this rate you will make such progress that by comparison, I may appear a wretched old man When that happens, please spare a merciful glance for me "

'After June, 1925" Munshi writes, "our letters assumed a new form We admitted without any reserve that we belonged to each other I was convinced that we were going to live together and so we discussed threadbare our future "

During this time Munshi's practice at the bar was rising fast The affairs of the Sahitya Samsad in Gujarat engrossed his attention Some of his finest writings

belong to this period But in Bombay, he was alone and without friends, grimly fighting a world which was trying to break him by a conspiracy of calumny Munshi kept his head high, his lips closed and he worked hard He knew that if ever he received a setback in his successful career society would not hesitate to dance on his dead body

Munshi writes

> "Even the Bar Library which is generally generous in such matters was highly critical I dared not stand near a gossiping table lest a vulgar joke be cracked at my expense which would make me mad with indignation Few knew the self-denying ordinances I had imposed upon myself and what I suffered because of them But the worst came from my friend and Guru, Bhulabhai, who, with the liberty of a boss, indulged in ribald jokes about me I could not escape him, I could not hit back, I was inclined to shout back in anger, but I never forgot that years and years ago, as an obscure, helpless, young lawyer, I had come to his chamber and sat at his feet to learn the art of law"

One day in February 1925, Munshi's great friend Manukaka and his wife came to him seriously perturbed

"People are saying all kinds of things about you They suspect you," said Manukaka

"You are wrong They do not *suspect* me They are positive that I am guilty of flagrant immorality So there is nothing to worry about," Munshi replied

"I am asking my husband to force you to realise that the situation is becoming intolerable It hurts even to hear the things that are being said about you," said Mrs Manubhai

Munshi reassured her. "Please do not worry I am

not worried about it myself Fellows who have found no joy in life are enjoying it vicariously by talking about us ''

There was another friend but of a different class That morning Mangaldas Desai came He was enquiring after Bala

''Her father will not give her to us,'' Munshi said. ''What can I do?''

''Except yourself, Munshi, Lilabehn has no friend in the world ''

''I know ''

''So when the time comes, don't like a coward refuse to marry her ''

''That time is far, far away,'' Munshi replied ''But when it arrives, believe me, I shall not back out Of course, if she refuses me, then there would be no help ''

And thus Lilavati was virtually an outcast Munshi single handed fought his social world with the determined heroism of an unbending outlaw

Life at Panchgani, however, was not without its lighter side Munshi had engaged a poor scholar to collect quotations from old literary manuscripts After some months the gentleman died suddenly leaving a helpless widow So Munshi sent her to Panchgani to work for his mother When the lady arrived in Panchgani, she suddenly became a 'grand dame ' She would not be of any help whatever She wanted Tapibehn to give her socks ''I cannot walk a step bare-foot,'' she used to say Instead of her serving Tapibehn and the children it was she who demanded their services Tapibehn was forced to look after her comfort She even went about ordering the children She also developed the habit of complaining about everything in the house At first the children enjoyed her airs and tantrums, but very soon she became

a nuisance At last and with considerable difficulty, Munshi induced her to go back to her village, but he continued to help her financially

13

'INTERLAKEN' COME

IN October, 1925, Munshi purchased the 'Ruby Villa,' at Panchgani, had it repaired and renamed it 'Girivilas' It was to be their home, their asylum during the long stretch of uncertain years which extended before them, their 'Golden Heaven' as Munshi called it

In spite of his increasing work and personal strain, Munshi became interested in the election to the Senate of the Bombay University, which were to be held in November 1925 Munshi decided to contest it In order to secure the necessary support he undertook a prolonged tour in different parts of the Bombay Presidency as it then was When he visited Baroda, for the College at which as he had and still has a strong attachment, he met Sir Manubhai Nandashankar Mehta, at that time Diwan of the State, and discussed with him the question of establishing a University for Gujarat Sir Manubhai arranged for Munshi an interview with Maharaja Sir Sayajirao Gaekwad to whom he explained the scheme The same evening Munshi gave a lecture on the need for a university for Gujarat Thus was born the idea which has now blossomed into three Universities the foundation of which Munshi has been associated with

His talk with Sir Sayajirao Gaekwad resulted in the appointment of the first Baroda University Commission, of which Munshi was a member In 1942, Munshi

became the Chairman of the Second University Commission which planned the present Baroda University

From Baroda, Munshi went to Poona and then to Broach and Ahmedabad Everywhere he received enthusiastic support Professor Balvantrao Thakur, the well-known poet of Gujarat wrote to one of his friends, "Gujarat cannot put forward a stronger candidate than Munshi"

On January 5, 1926, Munshi was elected to the Senate of the University This election had a special influence on his future career Immediately he was elected, he threw himself heart and soul into all the activities of the University

By February, 1926, Munshi was on several committees of the University In February 1926 he spoke in the Senate for the first time defying the advice of his friend, Prof Balvantrao Thakur, that he should for the first three years watch and weigh things as, the old man said, University education is a very difficult matter It was the first meeting of the Senate after his election and he wrote to Lilavati that evening

> "Today I spoke for the first time in the Senate. What I said was highly appreciated and they listened to me attentively You will read about it in the 'Times'"

In February, 1926, Munshi was elected to the Gujarati Board of Studies in the University In 1927 Munshi was elected to represent the University of Bombay on the Bombay Legislative Council, a privilege which he enjoyed till the elections of 1946 His activities in the Bombay Legislative Council brought him into direct contact with the Bardoli Campaign, with Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel

In a short while Munshi came to be prominently associated with all the activities of the University In this

way he obtained a keen insight into the problems of higher education in India In the Legislative Council, as we shall see, he helped the Education Minister to prepare and pilot the Bombay University Bill in 1928

The planets in their mercy however were planning a sudden change in the life for Munshi

When Lilavati left her husband's home she had left her only child, Bala, behind The father would not part with her and Lilavati, venturing out into the wilderness of life, did not want to ruin her daughter's future At the same time, she was torn with anxiety for the little girl who had been her only solace Her anxiety became more acute as the business of Bala's father went from bad to worse and the girl was being brought up in utter neglect

One day, in October, 1925, Munshi, on making enquiries, found that Bala had a severe attack of fever Lilavati came down from Panchgani, and the fever having been diagnosed as typhoid, Bala was transferred to a hospital For two months Lilavati stayed in the hospital, nursing her morning, noon and night When Bala had recovered, Lilavati was anxious to take her to Panchgani, but her father would not agree She, therefore, brought her daughter to his house and returned to Panchgani She had decided not to resume her old life, and, under no circumstances, would she do so now As a result of her absence from Panchgani for two months, she lost the chance of appearing in her Cambridge examination that year

Munshi also felt responsibility for Bala, if he had to make the mother happy he could not neglect the child. He therefore, tried to do his best to look after Bala In a letter to Lilavati he wrote

> "Bala is well Jadibehn and Lata (Munshi's sister and daughter) went to see her yesterday She

has recovered her normal health I suggested her visiting Panchgani for a change Lalbhai replied, 'I haven't the money to purchase warm clothes for her ' He is thinking of sending her to Ahmedabad for fear that I would take her away "

Within two weeks Munshi was writing again (14 11 25) ·

"I have succeeded in inducing Bala's father to execute a trust deed for her Lalbhai, Bala and Shankarlal came to see me Bala is now completely recovered Lalbhai is extremely weak and climbed the stairs with great difficulty He proposed the trust Bala will get the property when she is thirty-five instead of five years later You are to receive Rs 7,000/- which would revert to Bala after your re-marriage or death, to which I added a third clause 'or if you decline to accept it ' Lalbhai feels that his days are numbered "

Suddenly Lalbhai was taken ill and died on January 11 and soon compelling reasons forced Munshi and Lilavati to hasten their marriage

When Munshi received the news of Lalbhai's sudden death, his first thought was of Bala He rushed to their house and induced the step-brother and one of Bala's trustees to send her to her mother at Panchgani The step-brother took the view that now that Bala's father was dead, her mother would return to Ahmedabad, at any rate for the ceremonial mourning period and bring back his step-sister

It does not appear that Munshi was thinking of marriage yet, for a few days later he was writing to Lilavati "I hope Bala has arrived safely Today I have made it clear to the step-brother that she is not returning from Panchgani even if you are not there *Next year you may*

have to go to England for higher studies, in which case she will have to stay with mother He has agreed '"*

But the problem of Bala soon became acute Munshi writes in his Autobiography that Lilavati as the widow was expected to go to Ahmedabad for the ceremonial mourning However, she had broken off all relations with her husband's people and was not going to do anything of this sort

Her not going to Ahmedabad would immediately lead to complications The brother would not tolerate the step-sister living with her mother who did not even come for the mourning ceremony His natural anxiety would be to claim the custody of his step-sister, to bring her up in his own way and marry her into his own community

Anxiously Munshi thought about this If the step-brother demanded Bala's custody no resistance was possible He could easily go to court, make an allegation against Lilavati that she was living with Munshi and she would, in the normal course, never be given the child's custody At the same time, if the step-brother was given custody of the little girl, she would be brought up in utter neglect without education and married at an early age The absence of her mother would always be a stigma on the poor child and her future would be in danger And if she was miserable, Munshi was sure that Lilavati would continue to be miserable for the rest of her life

> "There was only one way out" writes Munshi in his Autobiography "If we got married none could take Bala away from us At the same time, if we married at once society would tear us to pieces But should we lose Bala or take up the challenge (of society) I made up my mind and wrote to Lila as follows —

* Italics mine A K M

'Now about you You may think that I am making too many terms and issuing orders in the fashion of a *Napoleon!* Within three months you will have to recoup your health and brighten up your English Give up studying mathematics and dismiss the teacher, they are proving burdensome to you I want to have a frank talk with mother If people know that we are going to marry there will be a storm You had better tell Sister Stainslaw that you will have to leave Panchgani for private reasons From now on please concentrate on studying English Discharge the Pandit, appoint someone else to give you morning lessons in English conversation

'Now for the programme I shall come to Panchgani in February You will have to come here on March 15 for the Parishad Meeting

*'Interlaken' will come on the 4th April

"On the 5th Mr and Mrs Munshi will be At Home to the President of the Parishad The Court closes for the vacation on the 12th, after which we go to Darjeeling or Kashmir for a month and a half Before that we shall be at Panchgani with mother and the children for a week I know I am rushing you Perhaps you may be frightened But we have suffered enough We are not going to undergo suffering any longer out of regard for social conventions No one has given us credit for anything and no one will do it any way"

Munshi discussed this very difficult problem with his mother She immediately agreed to the idea of his marrying Lilavati early This for an orthodox Brahman widow

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* Evidently their visit to Interlaken had associations with them and the word was always referred to indicate marriage

of seventy was an act of generosity, which has scarcely a parallel She however only made two conditions firstly, that the marriage should be performed according to Hindu rites, secondly, that after marriage, as is usual in their family, Munshi should take Lilavati to Broach and worship the family deity She also consulted an astrologer. One of Munshi's nieces was very ill and she was not likely to recover If she died, it would be inauspicious to perform the marriage for a month She, therefore, gave him the choice of having the marriage performed in February or after April

Munshi had to fix the earlier date, February 15th, because he had heard that Bala's step-brother had already an inkling of the coming marriage and was preparing to claim her custody before that took place Information also reached Munshi that his life was in danger and he carried a loaded revolver with him wherever he went

During this critical period of Munshi's life, his mother stood by him like a rock

"Even as I write now," Munshi writes in his Autobiography, "I cannot think of that wonderful mother, sage and loving, without worshipful affection She blessed our marriage, she had the courage to tread the path of truth regardless of what others might say When we were actually discussing the arrangements of the marriage, she suggested 'I have been to you both a father and a mother, I shall therefore issue invitations under my signature and invite all our friends and relatives We are not doing anything shameful' In her wise way she thus put the seal of her sanction on this, the most unorthodox of marriages"

But the wedding date had to be kept a secret A friend had his house painted and made preparations for

a party on the pretext that he was giving a reception because he had recently been made a Justice of the Peace The invitations were posted late at night on Sunday, so that people would only receive them after the 10 o'clock post on Monday, the day of the wedding

On Monday morning, Tapibehn, Lilavati and children arrived in Bombay As Munshi was well known in Bombay society, two thousand guests came to attend the wedding without knowing who the bride was It was a piece of calculated defiance of social canons in which the leading men and women of Bombay suddenly found themselves

The ceremony was over, the visitors departed and relations and personal friends were left behind and quite a few hilarious speeches were delivered Next day, the *Bombay Samachar*, the leading Gujarati daily, came out with a ten-column description of the marriage The Sub-editor who happened to be in the family party evidently took down every word of the speeches made by Munshi's friends The issue burst almost like a bomb in certain circles, and it was difficult, almost impossible, to get a copy of the *Bombay Samachar* even for a rupee in Bombay In Ahmedabad, it was said, a copy was sold for as much as Rs 25/-

Concluding the description of the marriage, Munshi writes in his autobiography —

> "Thus ends the story of our marriage We came from different places, we belonged to different castes, by accident, we came together and were mutually attracted We saw the vision of our Undivided Soul and became friends and a literary partnership sprang up between us Our journey to Europe was without parallel even in fiction For all this, we had to suffer We defied society, let our reputation

be mutilated and were, at all times, prepared to lose everything Struggling against heavy odds, we felt exhausted when we set up our 'golden heaven' at Panchgani And we lived happily ever after, as happens only in crudely construed novels

"Had the end not come this way, if our love had met a tragic end future poets might have sung of our love, and young girls would have regarded us as the pole-star of their destiny How was this dream realised? It was due first to Lila I found that without her I could never be happy, she was willing and ever determined to take the place I gave her in my heart In doing so, she threw her reputation to the winds, gave up home and whatever security she had, surrendered comforts, left her only child and lived in a strange house

"When she came to Panchgani, she had left everything behind She did not even stop to consider what would happen to her if I ever became tired of her or if I died Such thoughts never crossed her mind even for a moment She gave me all she had, never dreamt of the possibility of being separated and never wished to live except with me and for me, though she was at all times free to act according to her conscience And never did she wish to stray from the strict path we had chalked out for ourselves

"The second reason was the large-heartedness of mother She was a great woman I was her very life She did for me what no other mother would have done in her old age She understood me as no one else could have done After Lakshmi's death, she again took over the management of the family affairs In her quiet, shrewd way, she put Lila's loyalty to test She often told me, with rare idea-

lism, that I should not think of marrying anyone else and wait She adopted Lila as a daughter and co-operated with me in preparing the 'golden heaven' and to become its presiding genius She looked after my children and when Bala, then a problem child, came to us, enveloped her with the same care and affection

"Even after our marriage, her affectionate care brightened our life Whenever she could, she protected me from the unpleasantness to which I had been otherwise exposed At the same time, she raised around Lila and me such a high wall of idealism that, during the most critical period of our life, we stood strong in our unity and yet never lapsed into untruth

"Mother has been the guardian goddess of my life"

PART II

MUNSHI THE LAWYER

1

ENROLLED AS AN ADVOCATE

THE Munshis of Broach had, in every generation, more than one lawyer at any rate during the last few generations. At one time, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were not less than eleven members of that large family connected with the profession of law and revenue collection. Munshi's great-grandfather, Karsondas Munshi, was a distinguished lawyer, who, for some time, was Government pleader of the Sadar Court at Surat and later the Sadar-Ameen, what we now call Civil Judge, of Thana, then a position of great standing. Narbheram, the grandfather, was also a lawyer. Munshi's father, Maneklal, served in the revenue department rising to the rank of Deputy Collector and there were at the time not less than five or six lawyers in the family.

Maneklal's eldest brother, Parshuram, followed the ancestral profession of law. The story of how he rode to Bombay on a horse and obtained the coveted *sanad* of a High Court pleader has been set down by Munshi as narrated to him by his uncle.

> "The day before I started for Bombay for my examination, our *munim* started ahead in a bullock-cart. I followed on horseback. Bhai (Grandfather) had sent men in advance to arrange for my reception at the different towns on the way. Every arrangement was perfect and wherever I went, I received a hearty welcome and a good feast.
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> "After some days I reached Bombay and put up with Dhirajlal Mathurdas, a great friend of Bhai's. He was the Government pleader in the High Court, as you know.

"Dhirajlal first enquired of me about the welfare of the different members of the family He then said

" 'Look here, Parshu, I shall take you to the Chief Justice tomorrow I hope you are ready with your answers '

" 'Don't worry, Kaka," was my reply 'I will answer all your questions I am an expert in answering questions But don't ask me difficult ones '

"The next day we proceeded to the High Court, Dhirajlal in a palanquin and myself on horse-back After some time I was called into the presence of the Chief Justice, who was seated on a big chair in the majesty of wig and gown I saluted him respectfully.

"Dhirajlal had some conversation with the Chief Justice in English about me The Chief Justice then asked him 'Does the candidate know what is the law of mortgage?'

"Dhirajlal then turned to me and asked in Gujarati 'Parshuram Munshi, are you married?'

"I promptly answered in the affirmative Dhirajlal told the Chief Justice that I knew all about the mortgages

" 'Ask him what is the equity of redemption,' the Chief Justice said to Dhirajlal

"Dhirajlal again turned to me and asked in Gujarati 'How many persons were invited on the occasion of your marriage feast and what were the dishes served?'

" 'Sir, there were three dishes of sweets,' I replied and described the menu

" 'That is enough,' said Dhirajlal to me and turned to the Chief Justice with a smile 'My Lord, the answer is correct,' he said 'It must be correct He comes from a lawyers' family His father is a

lawyer, his grandfather was a lawyer The Munshis suck in law with their mothers' milk'

"The Chief Justice smiled He took a big quill pen, dipped it into a huge inkpot and signed the *sanad* which lay near him His Lordship then handed over to me I saluated as humbly as I could, gathered up the *sanad* and marched out triumphantly from the Court"

Another uncle of his, well-known in the Gujarat of that day, Hardevaram—called 'Adhubhai'—Munshi, was the colleague and friend of two other well-known lawyers, Narbheram Thakore and Harilal Setalvad Evidently, there was something in the doctrine of "sucking law with the mother's milk" For, the nephew of 'Adhubhai' Munshi, Harilal Setalvad's son and grandson, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad and Sri Motilal Setalvad, and Narbheram Thakore's son, Sri Govindlal Thakore, have all been distinguished lawyers

In March 1907 young Munshi, with the Degree of Bachelor of Arts as his only worldly equipment, arrived in Bombay to have his first taste of law On arrival he made straight for Sri Krishnalal Jhaveri, (now Dewan Bahadur), a friend of the family, who was the only influential individual in Bombay then known to him Sri Jhaveri was until then practising in the High Court and had just been appointed a Judge in the Small Causes Court He gave him a note of recommendation to Sri Dinshaw (later Sir Dinshaw) Mulla who was then Principal of the Law College The first experience of law ended in a disappointment in as much as the Principal expressed his regret for not granting the young aspirant the necessary term. Young Munshi then returned to Broach

In June 1907 Munshi again came to Bombay to prosecute his law studies After some interval, when he stay-

ed as a guest of a relative, he tried to settle down in Kandewadi, in Bombay, by approaching the Trustees of Kanji Khetsey Chawl for a room, but his request was turned down at first as he had no womanfolk to come and live with him One of the Trustees, on hearing his surname, however, asked him if he was a relative of 'Adhubhai' Munshi who was for sometime the Receiver of the Dakore Temple On being assured that he happened to be the nephew of 'Adhubhai,' the Trustees directed the Bhaiyya to give this nephew of the famous lawyer a decent room without the guarantee which the presence of a wife ensured The incident is important because in his first approach to Bombay life, young Munshi came across two institutions—the Kanji Khetsey Trust and the Dakore Temple—with which in later years he not only came into close contact but was responsible for their development to a considerable extent

During this early period Sri Dalpatram Shukla, who later became a solicitor of the Bombay High Court, and Sri Pranlal Munshi later a lawyer of Baroda, and a leader of the local Praja Mandal, were his constant companions. In between his legal studies, he spent much of the time in the Petit Library or in political discussions or long walks at Chowpatty interspersed with visits to Gujarati and Urdu theatres which at that time happened to be the highlights of the Bombay entertainment world

The most important intellectual influences on Munshi's mind during this perod were the *Gita* whose verses he had made a practice of memorising and reciting and the works of Carlyle About the latter he wrote in his diary "Carlyle has become my best companion He has given me considerable confidence "

In July 1910, Munshi passed his LL B examination On the 22nd of the month he came to Bombay to receive

his law degree He went to see Sri Manchhashankar, a brother of Sri Jamietram, the latter was the founder of the solicitors' firm of Messrs Matubhai Jamietram and Madan While Munshi was with Manchhashankar, a well groomed gentleman peeped in and greeted the latter The young man went away after bidding Manchhashankar goodnight The latter turned towards Munshi and said, "See, this is fate, you do not know him, he is Bhulabhai Desai, once a professor at Ahmedabad, now an advocate earning about Rs 4,000 a month This fellow has never even been to Europe Why don't you become an advocate like him?"

By sheer accident Sri Bhulabhai entered in the life of the young lawyer and indirectly contributed in a large degree to his future way in life Munshi records this accidental meeting in his inimitable style "Can this be called an accident?" he asks "Bhulabhai and I have always been chained together, willy-nilly, like two stars equidistant and yet near, roaming in the limitless sky—separate from each other and yet joined together by a magnetic force"

In October 1910 Munshi decided to go in for the Advocate's Examination Writing to a friend at that time he complains, as all other prospective advocates must have done, that it was tiresome to have to keep on staring at the robed barristers and lawyers. The whole affair, he grumbled, seemed futile!

The literary coterie of Sri Chandrashankar Pandya came to consider the young lawyer as their chief pride and in 1912 young Munshi began to take an increasingly large part in the debates and discourses held under the auspices of the Students' Brotherhoood During this year, the Brotherhood advertised its intention to give the Motiwala Prize for the best essay on "The Theory and Practice of

Social Service" Munshi had the satisfaction of receiving the coveted medal from the hands of Lady Ratan Tata amidst the applause of Sri Chandrashankar and his friends Many were the opportunities that he got in debates and meetings to cultivate a habit of marshalling facts and arguments on social reform and of propounding propositions, in both of which fields Munshi in later years, was to excel before the Bench

But the natural diffidence, born of mofussil breeding and atmosphere, had not yet entirely vanished In February 1913, Munshi appeared for the Advocate's Examination Writing then to one of his friends he says "There is little hope of success, weak health, weaker still was the preparation" Again, he writes "Questions were fair, so were the answers, but there are such sturdy candidates that they are sure to beat me"

In March he went for the first time to Matheran, which has since then become his second home There he enjoyed Nature's lavish green foliage, and wrote "Came to Matheran The journey was delightful The earth's beauty is alluring Panorama Point is grand From there a marvellous view greets the eye" In his Autobiography he speaks of his first visit to Matheran with great fervour "I saw a mountain for the first time in my life The thick foliage of its trees, lovely groves, the twitter of the birds and the sweet fragrance of wild flowers have constantly given me quiet and inspiration Wandering on its roads, I have come to many a great decision in my life Even now I write this Autobiography here"

On the 11th of March, a telegram arrived in Matheran bringing the tidings that he had successfully passed through the great trial Munshi had become an advocate in the great and reputed line of Inverarity, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad and Sir Jamshedji Kanga "I have become an

Munshi 15th March, 1913
The day he was enrolled on the Original Side

advocate," he writes in his diary, "doubts, difficulties and diffidence have vanished"

The 'ides of March' 1913 found young Munshi in somebody's borrowed gown and bands being enrolled before Mr Justicse Beaman Messrs Shamrao Minochehar and Hiralal, Solicitors, gave him on that day his first brief and provided an opportunity for his maiden appearance Sri Jamietram, who was then the most eminent amongst Hindu Solicitors (and who bossed over them as he did over his own firm of Messrs Matubhai Jamietram and Madan,) arranged for the young advocate a chamber in a neighbouring atorney's office on a monthly rent of Rs 15 and did not forget to give advice characteristic of him not to adjust the chamber rent against fees payable by the attorney The chamber was worse than a jail room with only a room and only a roof ventilator for light The next room contained old, musty, stinking records, which during the monsoon, sent out insects careering into the adjoining chamber of the young lawyer In this cave-like chamber Munshi spent his waiting period with all the anxieties and tribulations which every junior at the bar has to undergo

Sri Jamietram apart from being an astute attorney, possessed certain outstanding qualities which would have stood him in good stead in any profession or occupation he would have chosen to follow Wherever he went, he breathed strength, orderliness and self-confidence and he was a pillar of strength to his brother solicitors and clients He took an amazing delight in influencing other people's lives During his career as a solicitor, he repaired the broken fortunes of many a client

Sri Jamietram now commenced taking interest in Munshi which meant that he had decided to take in hand the entire legal career of the young lawyer He and his nephew Sri Narmadashankar of Messrs Manchershaw and

Narmadashankar started sending small briefs to Munshi Likewise, he also decided that the young lawyer would best devil with Sri Bhulabhai Desai, although Munshi, as irony would have it, would rather have joined Sri Jinnah's chamber. But Sri Jamietram ultimately prevailed by merely stating that there would be a variety of things to learn at Sri Bhulabhai's

On the 12th of June 1913 Sri Jamietram took the nervous, self-diffident Munshi to Sri Bhulabhai, who had just returned from England He was duly introduced Sri Bhulabhai smiled in the way people who knew him well can realise, and young Munshi was left to make his way in the august chamber On the first day the master told the pupil: "Lowndes once told me what I am telling you If you will be useful to me, I will likewise be useful to you Come here at about 6-30 in the evening and meet me when I am alone here Generally the solicitors do not appreciate a third man being present" Thus ended the first interview between the master and the pupil

2

EARLY DAYS AT THE BAR

From the next day, the life of a fresh advocate started with its dry and uninteresting routine Like all newcomers who join the High Court, Munshi used to start from home at ten in the morning, read the whole day, sit in his cave of a chamber until half-past six waiting for the rare sight of an attorney, and then attend Sri Bhulabhai's chamber, and wait there until his senior was free from the usual round of consultations. Then with all the rest of the devils, young Munshi would go in and put a question or two on

irrelevant matters to attract the attention of the great man.

In July 1913 young Munshi got his first responsible brief and appeared before Chief Justice Scott in an appeal from Thana Court Sir Basil Scott was a Judge who had not the habit of sailing with a senior counsel. Sir Basil was indifferent whether a senior or a junior appeared before him To him facts were paramount, personalities of little importance.

When young Munshi came to the Court he found to his great concern that he was being opposed by no less a person than the Advocate-General, Sir Thomas Strangman. Sir Thomas used then to be the terror of the junior Bar, very often to the Bench as well, and was inclined, like many a counsel, to interfere when the other side was arguing Conducting a first case is always a nervous affair and young Munshi fumbled and mis-stated a fact or two Up stood Sir Thomas and sneeringly corrected him But Sir Basil was vigilant and with his characteristic severity cried halt to the Advocate-General "Mr. Advocate-General, your innings are still to come " Sir Thomas felt perplexed and sat down "Mr Munshi," the great Judge said, "you may now proceed," and proceed he did without any more untoward incident

A few days later Sri Jamshedji Kanga (later Sir Jamshedji and now a doyen of the Bombay Bar) rolled into the library as he always does (he never walks or strolls in) and greeted the young advocate "Are you Munshi?" "Yes", said the thrilled advocate "You conducted a case before Scott a few days ago?" "Yes" "He has formed a good opinion about you I had a talk with him in the club He remembered you when he was making appointments of law professors but you are so much of a junior " Nothing tangible happened but it was heartening to the young lawyer to be mentioned by a Chief Justice and compli-

mented by Sri Kanga The year rolled on monotonously with many a day spent in the library interspersed with a few appeals sent from the mofussil and a few briefs contrived by Sri Jamietram and his attorney friends The fee book for the year 1913 showed a gross receipt of Rs 1,150, a figure considered not bad for a fresher

Before he enrolled himself at the Bar, young Munshi had joined the Articled Clerks' Association Amongst the more well-known men in the Association were Sri Nayansuklal Pandya, Sri Manilal Nanavati, Sri B G Kher (later the Premier of Bombay) and Sri Dhanjishah Nanavati Sri Pandya passed his Solicitor's examination in March 1912 and started his own firm In September of that year Sri Manilal became a solicitor and joined his brother's firm Later on, when Sri Kher became a solicitor in 1918, Munshi was helpful in starting the firm of Messrs Manilal and Kher The friendly relations which thus commenced in 1918 remained unbroken till their climax was reached when Munshi joined the first Congress Ministry headed by Sri Kher in 1937 About this period Sri Kher became the secretary of Mr Justice Beamen Owing to some eye trouble Beamen was not able to see properly, much less to read Nevertheless, the Judge was both a keen scholar and an ardent lover of books Sri Kher used to read to him and spend most of his time with the Judge and went more than once on European tours with him Through his close friendship with Sri Kher, Munshi too came into personal contact with the Judge When he appeared before Beamen J the Judge used to treat him kindly and gave the young lawyer great encouragement

It was in Mr Justice Beaman's Court that young Munshi had his first big case on the Original Side An illiterate grass merchant had died leaving behind him two widows, a mistress and a son by the mistress and a fortune

amounting to five or six lakhs of rupees The case of the mistress was that she was a legally wedded wife of the deceased and that her son was his legitimate child and heir of the fortune Young Munshi was briefed as the junior of Sri Rustom Wadia for the mistress and her son Sri Rustom Wadia was considered by the attorneys as the favourite of Mr Justice Beaman and was in great demand in that Court Every morning and evening the solicitor and the junior counsel used to meet and make preparations for the impending trial The junior would complain to the solicitor that there was neither the requisite evidence nor preparation The solicitor used to counsel patience and comfort the junior by assuring that everything would be done

One day the junior said that if his client was a wedded wife there must be some evidence of marriage The solicitor turned to his clerk and asked where that evidence was The clerk complacently replied "I will bring the witnesses to-night" "But if the wedding took place," said the counsel "there must be the invitation cards, the priest to perform the wedding" "Oh! yes, that's true," said the attorney, and turned again to his clerk inquiring as to where the evidence was The clerk assured that even that evidence would be brought the next day When the motley crowd of witnesses was brought before Sri Rustom Wadia, he turned to his junior saying that he felt there was some thing wrong somewhere Anyway the trial commenced; witness after witness, all of them, needless to say, eye-witnesses of the marriage, went in and out of the witness-box, each narrating the picturesque story in detail to the surprise of the other side Ultimately, the case was, as it happens in all such cases, compromised and the mistress with the ambition of being styled the legally wedded wife

of the grass merchant, received a not too inconsiderable amount and so also did the precious heir.

Sri H. V. Divatia (later Sir Harsidhbhai Divatia, ex-Chief Justice of Saurashtra) and one or two other friends had started practice by now on the appellate side and very often young Munshi began to be briefed on the appellate side in several mofussil appeals Some friends in Surat and Broach were keen on giving all possible help to him. A dispute arose about an election in the Rander Municipality and Munshi was briefed to appear in the Surat District Court When the train started for Surat, Munshi found in the next compartment his old friend Sir Thomas Strangman who still somewhat terrified the young lawyer. With great bravado, Munshi addressed the District Judge for four hours Sir Thomas addressed for half an hour and won The client gave Munshi a packet of Surat sweets and the lawyer paid his own railway fare back

How dangerous an opponent Sri Jamietram could be can be seen from the following incident.

Young Munshi had drafted a plaint which, according to him, could not possibly have any defence The plaintiff complained that his wife had deserted him and had gone and stayed with her uncle He claimed conjugal rights and a return of ornaments which, according to this innocent victim of domestic cruelty were of the value of Rs 50,000 No written statement was filed and, in course of time, the suit appeared as an undefended long cause The defendant was not expected to appear at the time of hearing Munshi was briefed and he thought that he had simply to lead evidence of the lovelorn husband and ask for a decree At 2-15 p m when Munshi went into Mr. Justice Beaman's court he found not the defendant but Sri Jamietram seated there brooding

"Are you in this case?" asked Jamietram.

"Yes," replied Munshi

"Are you taking a decree in this case?"

"Oh! Yes, of course"

"All right Let's see how you take it" said the old solicitor

In the voice of Sri Jamietram, Munshi found some implied threat All the enthusiasm with which he had entered the Court gradually trickled away When the case was called out the defendant was not there but the Associate Registrar of the Court got up from his seat and read out a letter to the Judge from the wife Old Jamietram was sitting opposite with a steady smile on his face which appeared more dangerous than ever In the letter the wife alleged that the plaintiff was an unemployed idler, was addicted to cocaine, and had wasted such little property as she had brought from her father. Tired of his cruelty she had, out of sheer desperation, gone to live with her uncle

The Judge barked at young Munshi. "Your client appears to be a veritable rascal."

"Nothing of the kind", said the advocate bravely, and added: "My client is going into the box presently and your Lordship then will see that these allegations are totally false"

The plaintiff then entered the box with a lump of betel leaf in his mouth, his cap titled on one side and his whole appearance distorted by a long tongue lolling out from one side of his mouth

"Are you the plaintiff in this suit?" was the first question

The witness, instead of looking at the counsel, turned to the Judge "My lord", came his voice in a slow rolling way—"*Khun* (murder) committed—my father-in-law—by Jamietram Jivaram, Solicitor, High Court and M T Diwan of Bhavnagar"

Munshi then realised why Sri Jamietram was there all along A great effort was necessary to save the situation "My lord", said he, "the witness does not understand English; he needs the aid of the interpreter"

But the Judge by then was more than ever interested in the husband and wanted to probe into the murder mystery He questioned the witness "What happened to this murder?"

"My lord", came the reply, "my father-in-law's *khun* committed—Jamietram Jivanram, Solicitor, High Court—M T Diwan Bhavnagar

A smile lit up the Judge's face Shri Rustom Wadia who was watching with great interest the spectacle whispered to Munshi in a not too inaudible voice to pray for the withdrawal of the suit with liberty to file a fresh suit Munshi's attorney, of course, had fled by this time and the Judge announced with the objectivity associated with our judicial administration "Mr Munshi, you cannot do anything better than this"

After two or three years of hard work young Munshi had gained the confidence of Sri Bhulabhai Desai During the strenuous period of *devilling*, he used to prepare for his senior a number of pleadings and opinions, much time also used to be spent on preparing exhaustive analysis of other briefs Many a time Sri Bhulabhai used to take young Munshi to his residence directly from the chamber and there both of them used to work out brief after brief, till late hours

Sri Bhulabhai had an extraordinary analytical mind and a way of stating and re-stating facts and propositions of law He used to start by saying 'no' to everything said and then arrange the facts in his mind in his own way At last he would say, "Munshikaka, now they fit in" This method enabled Sri Bhulabhai to conduct many a big case

merely by relying on his memory More than his ability to present his case, he possessed the wonderful gift of knowing that a particular manner of presentation would go a long way with a particular judge and that way, he could generally win over that judge to his side within a few minutes.

Young Munshi came into contact with Sir Chimanlal Setalvad having by this time already appeared in some suits as his junior Sir Chimanlal's advocacy was of a different category He depended entirely on sheer intellectual strength and a vast knowledge of human nature. He never depended upon the cheaper weapons that are sometimes, though fortunately rarely, used to please the Bench No attempt to please either the client or the solicitor was ever made The opposite side always and invariably received courtesy and fairness. The Bench was dealt with dignity and severity and rarely allowed to digress from the path which Sir Chimanlal had decided it should tread Severe precision of language, a presence of mind and an imperturbability almost superhuman were the main traits of his advocacy

Intense *devilling* with a senior entails hard work without any direct reward for it But reward sometimes comes unexpectedly In 1917 the well-known case regarding the trade name of the famous jewellers of Bombay, Narottamdas Bhau, was being attended by Sri Nariman of Messrs. Ardeshir Hormusji Dinshaw, Solicitors The defendant, one Soni Narottamdas Bhanji, had started a rival concern and Narottamdas Bhau had filed a suit for injunction to restrain his rival from conducting a similar business with almost a similar trade name Sri Nariman had briefed with several other leading counsel Sri Bhulabhai for the plaintiff. While Sri Bhulabhai was addressing the Court, he asked young Munshi, who was not then briefed in the case, to find an appropriate case, telling him that he would still ad-

dress for an hour and that his *devil* should find a case in the meanwhile Munshi rushed to the library and after a few minutes of rush-work found the wanted precedent Sri Bhulabhai relied on that case

Next day, Sri Nariman met Munshi in the library and said "Mr Mehta, you have, I hope, received my brief"

"My name is not Mehta, and I have not received your brief," said the junior

"But you brought that case to Bhulabhai, is it not? Are you not K M Mehta? Is not your chamber in Bhaishankar's office?" asked the attorney.

"No Mr M J Mehta happens to have his chamber there, not I" said young Munshi, feeling that the fat egg had already slipped from his hands

Sri Nariman immediately went, panting as was usual with him, to the mistaken counsel, brought the required brief and almost pushed the thing into Munshi's hands, adding, "Do your best"

Such are the random rewards of *devilling*, a system which if a junior is lucky enough to have a responsive senior to work for, is fruitful The fees earned in this brief brought the first library cup-board and the first ornament to the Munshi household

In the May vacation of 1917 Bhulabhai took young Munshi to Darjeeling Sri Chhotubhai of Messrs Madhavji & Co also was a member of the party Sri Chhotubhai was a great lover of art and literature, apart from being an eminent solicitor of the day The elderly solicitor and the young advocate spent many an hour reading together great classics like *Meghaduta*, *Gita Govinda* and *Amaru Shatak* Sri Chhotubhai had read Munshi's first novel *Verni Vasulat* and had already been attracted towards the novel, as also to its author It was during this tour that young Munshi met the famous scientist, Sir Jagadish

Munshi family, 1917

Chandra Bose, and learnt the miraculous mysteries of plant life upon which Sir Jagadish then had already made his famous discoveries.

Between 1913 and 1918 Munshi planned an elaborate and thorough programme for equipping himself with the necessary qualifications of a good lawyer. In spite of the dire poverty with which he was then struggling, this strenuous programme that he set before himself was followed meticulously.

On joining the Original Side Bar, the first thing that Munshi found was that his English pronunciation formed in the back-water atmosphere of the Baroda College, was very bad. To cure this defect he carried a little pocket note-book with him in which he entered in Gujarati the correct accents of the English words as they were pronounced by the leading members of the Bar, then checked them at night with the dictionary and, as he came to and from the Court on a tram, he refreshed his memory of the correct pronunciation. For years he kept up the habit of checking up the pronunciation with a dictionary.

When Munshi joined the chamber of Bhulabhai in June 1913, he was given a written statement to be drafted. Proud of his knowledge of English, based on Macaulay, Carlyle and De Quincey, Munshi wrote out a florid draft and presented it to his *guru*. Bhulabhai read the first paragraph and threw the draft in the waste-paper basket remarking: "Munshi, this English will not do." This hurt Munshi very much and he began to unlearn the florid English he had acquired in the Baroda College and for four years every two or three days he took a new brief to draw a pleading from Bhulabhai's chamber and prepared as perfect a draft as he could. Bhulabhai was then considered one of the ablest draftsmen at the Bombay Bar, and the training Munshi received under him gave him both

the practical experience and the capacity to give a case a perfect shape at the earliest possible moment

During these years Munshi also collected the pleadings drafted by eminent counsel at the Bar like Inverarity, Lowndes and others Later, he added to the list some of the excellent drafts of Bhulabhai He followed the model of these drafts, more than that, while working for Sri Bhulabhai, he tried to draw the pleadings in the light of and following the language of Daniel's *Chancery Practice*, Roscoe's *Evidence in Civil Actions* and Seton on *Orders and Decrees* Such was his study of these works that he could lay his finger on a requisite paragraph in a moment At all times Munshi had been a lover of beautiful phrases and wherever possible he acquired the habit of using in his pleadings an appropriate phrase from a classical law book or a dictum of some great judge Often he would, for the purpose of his pleading, find out the nearest possible case from the decisions of the Privy Council or the House of Lords and reproduce the identical phraseology

Munshi was fascinated by the neatly expressed and short but authoritative judgments of the Privy Council published in the Indian Appeals Series He accepted this Series as his main source of strength in two ways He began to study each volume from 1914 backwards, studying each important judgment, analysing it and summarising its points He kept another note-book in his pocket in which he noted down the name of the leading case, the number of the volume and briefly the point decided in it This note, when he left off the habit, consisted of about 400 or 500 of the most leading cases in English and Indian Law In the early years whenever he had time he glanced through the note-book refreshing his memory of these leading cases As a result, important legal principles with their authorities got fixed up in his memory and were avail-

able to him and his colleagues whenever required In his early years, he thus became a walking reference book.

But that was not quite enough for Munshi During the vacations in those years, he took a leading judgment from one of the Indian Appeals volumes, every day analysed it on paper, set some of its appropriate phraseology against each point and, facing a mirror, tried to address himself on the case in the language or order used by a Privy Council Judge This practice very soon gave him a command of legal phraseology This training has been responsible for making Munshi's address in court entirely different from his public speeches While addressing the Court he worked up sets of propositions and closely marshalled the facts in clear and dispassionate manner till he raised a fabric of facts and principles, then he piled up effective phrases till a new shape was given to the case, winding up by drawing up a vivid picture of the case as a whole in a manner which made any other view look immature

After acquiring these two arts he next turned to the art of giving legal advice In training himself to give advice, he was considerably helped by the discussions he had with Bhulabhai in regard to the opinion briefs which Munshi had worked for him Munshi always said, that a discussion with Bhulabhai on a point of law was a training in subtlety, though Munshi himself had no little share of subtlety But soon he departed from the practice of the leading counsel at the Bombay bar of giving only short, direct and concise often mono-syllabic replies to the queries From somewhere he acquired some opinions of Sir Rash Behari Ghosh which were in a sense an elaborate discussion of the point, and following that model he gave his opinion the shape of a discussion of the point and the rival point of view supported with authorities

Munshi's view was that such an opinion would help the client's lawyers later in noting the pitfalls and developing the points in favour

It was later, after about 1922 when he had gained sufficient mastery over these aspects of advocacy that he turned his attention to developing the art of cross-examination As usual with him, it was an elaborate preparation to study all the different methods adopted by the leaders at the Bar and slowly he became a master of surprise in cross-examination It was very rarely that he dealt aggressively with a witness till he had in a sweet reasonable manner made him concede important points.

3

THE RISING LAWYER

Among the great judges, Sri Lallubhai Shah, (afterwards Sir Lallubhai), was the one with whom young Munshi came into close contact and for whom he entertained great regard and even affection Sir Lallubhai's incomparable ethical sense, his great sense of justice, and moderation of speech and thought attracted the respect of every one with whom he came into touch On the 1st of April, 1913 Sri Lallubhai Shah was raised to the Bench on the retirement of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar

Munshi summarising the main characteristics of this great Judge, says "He was more industrious than brilliant His advocacy was different from that of either Sir Chimanlal's or Bhulabhai's Full of dignity and solemn depth, it was ceaselessly absorbed in search of truth, dreaded exaggeration and was terrified of mere brilliance It had one sole object, to secure justice from the Judge"

These traits, we are told, became more and more confirmed after he became a Judge. Munshi was once conducting an appeal before him. The trial Judge had used some harsh words against the defendant's evidence and had characterised it as unreliable. Munshi added his own comments by saying, "My Lord, the mildest term that can be used for this witness is the one used by the learned Judge of the trial court, 'master-craftsman of the art of mendacity.'"

Sir Lallubhai looked up and said: "Mr. Munshi, do you mean to say that there can be a stronger term than this?"

Munshi retorted: "My Lord, the resources of the English language are not so poor as not to provide a stronger term."

The dread of strong terminology was in the Judge and out came the caution: "I don't want to hear a stronger word. This is quite enough."

Sir Lallubhai's main contribution as a Judge lay in his well-considered judgements on questions of Hindu law. It is said that, on his being raised to the Bench, he commenced learning Sanskrit with the aid of a *Shastri* and studied the *Dharmashastras*. Munshi had the opportunity of conducting several cases before him which involved certain important questions of Hindu law.

Bai Gulab v. *Jeevanlal* (24 Bom. L.R. 5) was one such case. Bai Gulab was a daughter by a Vaishya father and a Shudra mother. When she came of age the father ceased to care for her and a Bhatia lady took her under her wing and got her married to a Vaishya watch-repairer. A week or so after the marriage Gulab left her husband, who then filed a suit claiming conjugal rights. The case came up for hearing before Kajiji J. and Sri Bhulabhai appeared for the husband against Munshi. The principal contention on

behalf of the wife was that she was the daughter of a Shudra woman by a Vaishya, and therefore, a Shudra and that her marriage with a Vaishya being *anuloma* was prohibited by Hindu law The Judge immediately came on the defence counsel saying that in the event of his deciding that the marriage was bad, what would happen to the poor wife? Having lived already with the plaintiff for a time, who else would, in Hindu society, give her a wife's status? The case dragged on for two or three days and the Judge asked Munshi to persuade his client to settle Meetings were arranged in Munshi's chamber but Gulab remained as adamant as ever and instructed her counsel and attorney to go on with the case The Judge was informed of this and as sometimes happens, counsel became the butt of the Judge's displeasure Mr Justice Kajiji decided against the defence contentions and held the marriage a valid one

At 2-30 p m that afternoon the learned judge who was still perturbed by the refusal of Gulab to accept his suggestion of a compromise ordered that Gulab should forthwith go to her husband Munshi had anticipated this and was actually drawing up the grounds of appeal When the Judge finished, he asked for time to appeal and in the meantime prayed for a stay of the order The Judge would have none of it The defence asked for one day The Judge refused the request Ultimately he gave one hour in which to get the stay order from the Appeal Court

Munshi immediately rushed to Chief Justice McLeod's chamber, narrated the facts and told him that there was not enough time to have the grounds of appeal typed The Chief Justice asked Munshi to apply in open court at 3-30 p m that day and asked him to submit the handwritten memo of appeal Sir Thomas Strangman opposed him in the Appeal Court The Chief Justice asked: "Where the marriage itself is challenged, how can I allow

the decree to be executed?" and the stay order was granted

The appeal came for hearing before MacLeod C J and Sir Lallubhai Sri Jinnah appeared for the husband As soon as Munshi began his address MacLeod C J opened Mulla's Hindu Law and started, as was usual with him, to cut the matter short But Sir Lallubhai was already interested in the case and resisted any such attempts to cut the matter short The question of *anuloma* marriage was a vital question and for two days Sir Lallubhai and Munshi were absorbed in the mysteries of *Mitakshara*, *Mayukha* and other *Dharmashastras* Sir Lallubhai at last made the appellant admit that the *anuloma* marriage was not one prohibited by Hindu law This decision has still remained undisturbed as a landmark in the development of Hindu law

A rich Hindu fell ill in the house of a *nayakin* and died after a few days The *nayakin*, Nagubai, claimed to be the *avaruddha stree* of the deceased and filed a suit for maintenance against the widow and children of the deceased The case was heard in the trial court by Mr Justice Kanga Munshi who was for the defendants, *inter alia* contended that the deceased had relations with other women, apart from the plaintiff and that the defendants had no knowledge whether the plaintiff was a permanent or a temporary concubine The trial Judge decided against the defendants

The suit went up to the appeal court, consisting of Sir Lallubhai, who was then acting as the Chief Justice, and Mr Justice Crump For the appellants Munshi argued that although the Hindu shastras recognised the right of an *avaruddha stree* to maintenance and placed her on a footing analogous to a married woman, a mere concubine is not recognised and that in order to be so entitled the con-

cubine must have attained the status of *avaruddha stree* i e, she must have been openly kept and accepted by the deceased's family. A concubine kept in a hole and corner manner is not the *avaruddha stree* contemplated by the Hindu law Sir Lallubhai got interested in this argument and began to cite the ancient texts which even counsel had not produced The acting Chief Justice accepted the view that if that was not the position, it would be impossible for the legal representatives of the deceased to prove that the concubine was not a permanent or an exclusively kept mistress Sir Lallubhai held this argument to be valid and reversed the trial court judgement (*Moghibai* v *Nagubai* 24 Bom L R 1009)

Nagubai took her case to the Privy Council where Lord Darling favoured a commonsense to a merely scriptural view "Whoever heard of a family accepting a concubline? Would the members of the deceased's family in this modern world ever accept and recognise such a concubine?" he enquired and reversed the decision of the Appellate Court (*Nagubai* v *Moghibai* 53 I A 1553)

From the point of view of the surviving relations of the deceased, perhaps the point of view of Sir Lallubhai though involving a stricter interpretation of the law, was correct Unless the recognition of the concubine by the deceased's family was not made a necessary ingredient, it is possible that such relations may become the victims of false litigations and of consequent injustice What his clients lost, Munshi gained, for quite a few rich men who did not look upon with favour any posthumous claim by their mistresses, came to him for advice and for preparing documents to be executed by the mistresses that they were not permanent concubines

During the last year of the first World War there was a great spate of speculation in Japanese textiles In

October-November, 1918, certain groups of merchants in Bombay got themselves heavily involved in such dealings and more particularly in what was known as the Nine Dragon Japanese Longcloth There was a strong belief that the World War would still continue for another couple of years, with the result that every day marked big fluctuations in prices Thousands of bales changed hands and merchants every day counted lacs of rupees as profits, all of course, on paper. The bales were nowhere to be seen in the market, and no one intended or thought of giving or taking any delivery.

In November 1918 the war came to a sudden end and the prices tumbled down equally suddenly Purchasers refused to take delivery and a crop of suit for damages for breach of contract came to be filed From the meagre figure of 1,200 suits a year in the High Court on the Original Side, the number rose to 5,000 or more Munshi though comparatively a junior, had by then made his name both as a draftsman and as a dependable junior and got a fairly large share of the new crop. Apart from the usual court work, he was able, on an average, to dispose of four to five pleadings a day

The High Court premises were buzzing with litigants and commercial disputes of almost every kind involving a variety of legal points All these commercial suits came on for hearing in 1920 Chief Justice MacLeod, known for his quick disposal of matters, used to finish on an average fifteen to twenty of these commercial suits, most of which, instead of being thrashed out to a final judgement used to be compromised Sri Bhulabhai and Sir Jamshedji Kanga invariably appeared against each other in most of these matters

In the meanwhile, Sir Jamshedji was raised to the Bench and his junior, Sri Harilal Kania, who rose to be

the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 1947, joined Sri Bhulabhai and his group of juniors, among whom was Sri Motilal Setalvad the first Attorney-General of Free India and of course Munshi.

In the beginning of 1921 the Chief Justice, in order to dispose of the arrears which had accumulated, appointed seven Judges to sit on the Original Side in place of the two or three until then Upto this time the *holding* system prevalent in England was also accepted on the Original Side of the High Court in Bombay as a necessary concomitant of the dual system and the English traditions of the Bar Sri Bhulabhai was in great demand, particularly after Sir Jamshedji had gone to the Bench, and every evening briefs used to be collected in his chamber in increasing numbers Not being able to cope with the work he used to ask his juniors to *hold* briefs for him and work them out in the various courts while he himself attended one court and supervised and directed the work of his devils in other courts

The manner in which this *holding* system was being worked by Sri Bhulabhai, though contrary to the way in which it was handled in England, was not noticed so long as there were only two or three courts on the Original Side But with the increase of courts the work of all the courts collected in one chamber and a systematic monopoly of the entire work being established, the rest of the members of the bar grew restive Their complaint culminated in what Munshi called the 'Trial of the Seven Bishops'

A committee of inquiry was set up with Sir Thomas Strangman, Sri Bahadurji and Shri H C Coyaji to inquire into the charge that Sri Bhulabhai and his juniors were guilty of unprofessional conduct in carrying on business in partnership The trial ultimately ended in the acquittal of the seven members. But with the end of the

trial vanished tragically the *holding* system which, when worked in its true spirit, had been responsible for turning out junior members as worthy successors to their more experienced seniors

There is no doubt that the end of the *holding* system has resulted in the loss of the requisite training of the new members of the Bar It has also resulted to a large degree in the disintegration of the Bar

4

HEIGHT OF PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

By the time the holding system came to an end Munshi had already made his mark in the profession The Raja Bahadur Bansilal case in which he was briefed by Sri Manchershaw established him as the Leader of the Junior Bar

Sri Manchershaw, of Messrs Minocheher Manchershaw and Hiralal, Solicitor, was in many respects an extraordinary attorney Whenever he took a matter in hand the merely pecuniary aspect of it became immaterial Complete preparation on all factul aspects of the matter, including even investigation of questions of law and cross-examination, were made and when the brief was delivered counsel always felt that nothing had been left out Since 1915-16 he had grown fond of Munshi, and in many a matter he had taken the assistance of the young advocate and tested his ability Since then Sri Manchershaw had evinced in Munshi and his affairs a keen interest which was not merely friendly but was also paternal When Munshi got ready to go to jail in 1930, tears came to the eyes of this old solicitor Later I myself came in touch with Sri Mancher-

shaw in regard to certain personal matters of Munshi, and I perceived that in spite of old age the same paternal feeling for Munshi, the same love for detail and partiality for precision were still there

Raja Bahadur Shivlal Motilal was a businessman in a large way and a multi-millionaire of Hyderabad State He died leaving behind him a son, Raja Bahadur Bansilal and several grandsons Disputes arose between the Raja Bahadur and his two elder sons over the partition of the joint family property Sri Manchershaw was attending to this case on behalf of Bansilal's minor sons In 1922 this important case came up for hearing before Mr Justice Pratt and Sri Jinnah and Bhulabhai appeared for the plaintiffs, the elder sons of R B Bansilal Sir Jamshedji Kanga appeared for Raja Bahadur Bansilal Sri Manchershaw briefed Munshi with Sri Kania as the junior counsel

The main point involved in the suit was whether a Hindu father had the right to separate only one of his sons without severing the joint status between himself and the rest of his sons It was contended for the plaintiff that the father had no right to effect such a partial partition as regards some of his sons, and if he separated one son, there should be a total partition between him and all his sons Sri Jinnah and Sri Bhulabhai, who appeared for the plaintiff, contended that the father had no right to effect a partial partition as regards only some of his sons Prof Gharpure, one of the well-known authorities on *Dharmashastras* was helping them The points involved in the case were interesting and the research entailed considerable labour although now that they are settled by decisions, they do not arouse any curiosity From the point of view of a legal practitioner, the action was till then the heaviest and, the parties being well-known residents of Bombay, had become a *causus celebre* of the time It was also the most well-paid

case of the time and became a turning point in the history of the Bombay lawyers in increasing the scale of fees paid to counsel on the Original Side When the appearances of some dozen counsel were mentioned, Mr Justice Pratt, who heard the case, exclaimed "Where is the rest of the Bar?"

After a short opening Sri Jinnah sat down and Sir Jamshedji Kanga appearing for the father, Raja Bahadur Bansilal, in his address dealt with the legal aspects of the case mostly citing decided cases Then came Munshi's turn Unknown to Sri Manchershaw, Munshi had been calling a *shastri* at his residence and with his help was going through the original texts Tracing the father's right from the Vedic texts down to the *Mayukha*, he took the Judge step by step through the complicated labyrinth of citations In the intensity of the argument he forgot his juniority and the diffidence from which he then used to suffer and evolved a clear and elaborate argument before the impressed Court

At the end of the second day of his address when he sat down it was apparent that both the Court and the spectators were convinced that the performance was something out of the ordinary Sri Manchershaw, who all the time was seated opposite his counsel, was amazed at the arguments which did not form part of his instructions, he was overjoyed at the feat of his favourite Sir Jamshedji, who always delights in an able exposition of law by his juniors, was effusive in his appreciation Munshi's own *guru* shook his pupil's hands Unfortunately, the suit was settled and did not find a place in the Law Reports

This case was a landmark in Munshi's career giving him a place as the leader of the Junior Bar, besides bringing him a rich harvest of fees The case also focussed on him the attention of several firms of solicitors who were

not until then briefing him too often, with the result that the evenings became day by day busier and busier with conferences and consultations

Another important and equally complicated case which Munshi attended during this period was a misfeasance summons against the directors of the Anglo-India Steam Navigation Co Ltd , its career being more like the South Sea Bubble of England Sir Jamshedji appeared with Sri Bhulabhai for the liquidator and Sir Chimanlal, Sri V F Taraporevala and Munshi appeared separately for one or the other directors Once again, Sri Manchershaw was instructing Munshi One of the interesting aspects of the case was that one of the Directors of the Company was a very young son of Mr Justice Kajiji, then on the Bench The Judge himself was involved in the case The case lasted for a month and a half

During the pendency of the case Mrs Munshi fell seriously ill and Munshi had to conduct the case under great mental strain As the case progressed, the condition of Mrs Munshi became steadily worse and it reached a critical stage about the time that his turn came to address the Court The last five or six days before the actual addresses were over were almost terrible Mrs Munshi throughout the period lay unconscious, and the doctors reported her as sinking The case became so complicated that Munshi could not even think of giving it up or leaving it to some one else It was in that distressed state of mind that Munshi had to address the Court for four days As soon as he finished his address he went straight to his dying wife Two days later, the worst happened, and Mrs Munshi breathed her last

Those who know the intense preparation that is necessary in a case of this character will realise that with a dying patient in the house, Munshi must have had very

little time to marshall the facts of such a lengthy matter and prepare the requisite arguments By this time, however, he had begun to evolve a system of preparing a case in which he completely became a master Now, before the case opened, all that Munshi generally did was to master the pleadings of the case and to have before him a meagre sketch of the essential facts involved in the case, unless of course he was required to open the case involving complicated facts Peculiar though the system was to himself, at the start many a solicitor and client were in distress, believing that their counsel himself was not aware of all the materials of the case As the case proceeded Munshi used to take up a notebook in which he would jot down the analysis of the various points, the facts and the propositions of law, which he thought he would have to submit to the court All this was done while the case proceeded. He had got into the habit of thus completing his preparation in instalments, while at the same time he watched counsel on the other side and followed the evidence led by the opposite side He took down only important parts of evidence which, almost in an automatic fashion, got marshalled in the note book in a logical and a chronological form

When his turn to cross-examine a witness or to deliver the address arrived, the note was ready, but to a stranger it looked so hopelessly arranged that it was more a mess than the sketch of a lucid argument No one except himself could produce any coherence out of it To him, however, all that was necessary was to number the different notes in a logical order by a blue or red pencil Those who saw him closely at work realised that this special method of preparation only enabled him to do full justice to the most complicated cases without his having to sit up late hours for preparing his briefs Incidentally, on account

of this habit, a heavy brief did not put any strain upon his health which otherwise remained in a delicate state for several years It saved considerable time even in the midst of heavy cases for him to indulge in many activities, literary, political and cultural

One of the heavy cases which during this period put his knowledge and familiarity of book-keeping and accounts to a severe test was the famous case of Chand Chhap Kesar A very large business in saffron was being conducted by an old widow who rarely made any move in her business without consulting Sri Jamietram The muccadam, who had ben instructed to take delivery of certain cases of saffron which had arrived from Spain, got some papers signed by the old lady for the purpose of taking delivery of the cases from the Port Trust authorities When delivery of the cases was demanded by the lady's firm, the muccadam alleged that they were pledged with him to secure the repayment of Rs 20,000 advanced by him to the firm In support of his allegation the muccadam produced a document signed by the lady purporting to be an instrument of pledge The lady was practically illiterate and did not exactly know the kind of document which she had signed in favour of the muccadam The muccadam's books, which were produced in the court, showed that he had given the firm a loan of Rs 20,000. Munshi appeared for the widow, challenged the document as a forgery on the ground that the body of the document had been written on the blank space kept in the paper signed by the widow

Sir Thomas Strangman and Sri Bhulabhai who led Munshi had already taken a pessimistic view of the case Their junior, however, took a different view of the matter and shared Sri Jamietram's opinion that the widow had on the whole a fair chance of success The suit went on al-

most for a fortnight and in the absence of Sri Bhulabhai, Munshi had to conduct it In order to support his theory of having made the advance the muccadam produced his books of account On a first examination the books appeared to be in perfect order but on a closer scrutiny Munshi found that an elaborate set of entries had been made in order to provide therein the necessary balance of Rs 20,000 A more detailed inquiry for two or three days disclosed the key to the mystery.

Mr Justice Crump who heard the case followed the arguments in regard to the books with great deal of patience. It was a matter of touch and go and ultimately the muccadam's action was dismissed The dismissal was a joint triumph of Munshi and Jamietram who had proceeded with the case notwithstanding the adverse opinion of the senior lawyers

As expected, the muccadam went into appeal Sri Bhulabhai appeared this time for the widow, leading Munshi Convinced as he was that his client had no case, it was difficult to shake him from his view of the account books Within a couple of hours the appeal Court reversed the trial Court's judgment

The widow went to the Privy Council, where her counsel Sir George Lowndes K C applying the searchlight which those entries justly deserved, addressed that august body on those entries for a number of days At last the Privy Council upheld the view taken by the trial Judge and Munshi, and the decree of the appeal Court was reversed By a curious coincidence, Chief Justice McLeod who presided over the appeal Court here happened to be present in the Privy Council and actually witnessed the reversal of his somewhat hasty judgment Never was Sri Jamietram so full of joy at the performance of the young counsel whom he had brought up in the Bar

The method of presenting a case in a strictly chronological order and of propounding definite propositions has been Munshi's favourite method. Chronology, according to him, unravels many a difficult situation and when once seemingly contradictory facts are arranged strictly in this manner in a logical and coherent order the facts prove themselves. Chief Justice Sir Ambson Martén was a lover of such orderliness in counsel's address. He loved to hear elaborate arguments and Munshi loved to present them and consequently he became almost a constant fixture in the Court of that Chief Justice, appearing in several heavy cases which the Judge delighted to call 'Chancery Actions.'

Mr Justice Beaman had been holding the *Teji-mandi* transactions to be no more than wagering contracts. In many a case that Munshi appeared he had felt that Justice Beaman's temperamental horror of the Marwari businessmen had prevented him from appreciating the true nature of *Teji-mandi*. The case of *Manubhai* v *Keshavji* (24 Bom L R 60) which came up before Mr Justice Kincaid gave him the chance. The Judge luckily was free from any prejudice. But he had to be taken, for weeks together through detailed evidence and a labyrinth of account books in order to combat the prevailing notion that these contracts were by their nature wagering. Munshi's view was accepted by Justice Kincaid. The Appeal Court upheld the view and the trend of judicial opinion which had persisted for years was revised.

If Mr Justice Kincaid had no prejudice against this type of contracts, he was to a certain extent a peculiar man to tackle. He looked upon the court work as more or less an unavoidable nuisance. He had an intense fascination for Maratha History and Hindu Gods and loved to write about

them He used to take down every conceivable type of evidence without so much as applying his mind to it and only made a point of hearing counsel's arguments with attention at the end Whoever presented his case at this stage in a lucid and systematic manner, enabling the judge to produce a coherent and readable judgment, was more often than not likely to succeed Munshi's style of propounding propositions and his adherence to chronology were very useful to this judge and enabled Munshi to be a fixture in this Court for some months

Mr Justice Kincaid remembered Munshi several years later when he was writing his reminiscences "Forty Years as a Public Servant" After eulogising the Bombay Bar as "very pleasant and courteous", he referred to Munshi · "I remember especially my agreeable relations with Mr Munshi, a Gujarati Advocate Since then he has, unfortunately, become an extremist" When Munshi's *Gujarata and its Literature* was published, Kincaid reviewed it for the *Indian Empire Review* In the course of the review he wrote "Mr K M Munshi has one of the largest practices in the High Court of Bombay, at the same time he is one of the most widely read Gujarati novelist" The review apotheosised Munshi as 'the greatest master of Gujarati prose' Enclosing a copy of the Review, Kincaid wrote to Munshi "I trust that my stray remark about you in my reminiscences did not give you even a moment's annoyance With your talents as lawyer and novelist, I thought it a pity that like Burke you should "to party give up what was meant for mankind " However, if you can always combine politics with the production of books such as *Gujarata and its Literature,* then I shall certainly have no further quarrel with your extreme views!"

5

ON SEVERAL FORENSIC FRONTS

After Munshi's success in getting the true nature of *Tejimandi* transactions accepted by the High Court, he began to be briefed in a series of linseed cases and these cases came up before Mr Justice Taraporewala In many of these commercial cases he was generally opposed by Sri Kania, (later Sir Harilal) By this time Sri Kania had established a reputation for a keen appreciation of both accounts and the intricacies of commercial transactions which were then coming up for judicial decisions in the courts While these cases were going on, Munshi used to sit down with the merchants for hours on end and get them to explain to him the various aspects of their transactions In one of these cases, the learned judge hearing it set his face against the custom which Munshi was trying to prove. No sooner a witness's examination-in-chief was over than the Judge tucked up his sleeve, turned fiercely to the witness and put a series of questions The brokers, unaccustomed to this kind of judicial ordeal, completely broke down and started saying 'yes' to every question that was asked Even the Judge felt that there was something wrong and asked a witness severely "Why do you say 'yes' to everything that I ask?" The witness frankly replied "My Lord, how can I say 'no' to Sarkar?" The Judge's cross-examination destroyed the structure the minute the counsel raised it Ever since Munshi handled these cases he was in the habit of having a personal contact with the client wherever complicated facts were involved Once he undertook a case he warmed himself up to such an extent that he erected the fabric of his case not from the typed brief but by a living touch with the client himself

Between the years 1919-1930 there was scarcely a branch of law which Munshi did not deal It was during these years that he came to be acknowledged as one of the most reliable counsel for drafting pleadings Drafting is an art which can only be mastered, like all other arts, by constant practice and hard industry Curiously, however, drafting has always remained an undervalued piece of work though in many a case it throws on the drafting counsel responsibility until the matter is finally heard and disposed of

Munshi has always held that to be a good draftsman is a *sine qua non* for being a clear-headed lawyer and always insisted on his juniors and *devils* first learning the art of draftsmanship

Unlike the way he follows in his literary work, Munshi always insists upon using a uniform phraseology in his pleadings and generally entertains a horror for passive voice and complicated sentences An averment or a prayer in a plaint for a mortgage suit prescribed by the authorities like Buller and Leake is to him as inflexibly sacrosanct as a Vedic verse This uniformity of language he even exacted from his juniors and *devils* with the result that when his pleadings were drafted by one of his *devils* he could adopt them as his own with suitable variations

In the forties, he had to do some very complicated pleadings going over, some times, nearly to a hundred paragraphs One of the most elaborate drafts which he did was a written statement for a party in Hyderabad State which went into nearly ninety pages The draft was ultimately sent to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru for settling and he approved it with only a few minor corrections

From the point of view of sheer artistry, Munshi regards two of his plaints as his best efforts one was the plaint in the case of *Bansilal Abhirchand* v *Sir Manekji*

Dadabhoy, an action for the dissolution of partnership between the sons of the famous industrial magnate Sir Kasturchand Daga and Sir Manekji That case became a first class *causes celebre* at Nagpur both by reason of its volume and the personalities involved. At the hearing of the case Sri C K Daphtary and I were briefed for the Dagas and between us we cross-examined Sir Manekji for not less than four weeks In the beginning, the plaintiffs in that case had in their possession very few material documents as the management of the partnership had for more than forty years remained entirely in the hands of the defendant Munshi happened to be at Matheran and it was there that, with the scanty materials produced before him, he had drafted the plaint I remember vividly how on his return he was full of enthusiasm for this draft It was later on settled by Sri M C Setalvad and between them they had produced a plaint as perfect as one could expect in the circumstances The plaint was so flexible in language and shape that when the evidence was led it could stand the strain of a whole forest of complicated facts

The other memorable pleading was a plaint in a suit to be filed in Sholapur Court by a minor for setting aside an alienation by a Hindu father of an estate in Sholapur known as the 'Warad Estate' and also setting aside of certain debentures issued by a financing company floated for purposes which could hardly be called very proper The suit was transferred to the Bombay High Court and as coincidence would have it, I had to appear in this suit too for one of the parties Ultimately, the suit ended in a compromise decree

In 1936 one of the most interesting cases that Munshi was briefed in related to the controversy about the famous temple of Kesariyaji in Udaipur State In the early part of the 19th century the flagstaff of this temple had fallen

down and the Svetambar Jains who held considerable power in the state at the time put up a new flagstaff. After about a century that flagstaff too broke down. Dhulev, a village in the State where the temple is situated happens to be a Digambar village In recent years the Svetambars had lost much of their original power and influence and the Digambars now came forward to exercise their privilege of putting up the flagstaff

Riots followed The State appointed a Committee of Inquiry to decide between the rival contentions In the meantime, as the flag must fly, the State put up its own. Originally, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad and Sri Jinnah appeared for the rival parties Some time later, however, they returned their respective briefs. The Svetambars instructed Sri M C Setalvad and the Digambars Munshi. The main question in the Inquiry was as to which was the sect that had founded the famous temple

The inquiry involved a close study of several Jain shastras, the nature of the temple's architecture, genealogy of some of the more important jain *sadhus* who had worshipped there and a number of inscriptions which devout pilgrims had inscribed on the temple walls during the last several years Sri Setalvad had the advantage of being ably assisted by that famous Jain scholar, Muni Jinvijayji, who later became the Director of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Munshi, in his turn, revelled in the research, partly historical and partly legal, that he had to undertake in order to do justice to his side Udaipur until then had been a sealed book to him Its ancient atmosphere, together with the reminiscences of the geat Pratap and his warriors and the complete isolation of the State from the modern world, enraptured him

The most interesting part in the Inquiry was the one taken by the doves Udaipur at that time had hardly any

arrangement for a court Out of deference to the Bombay lawyers the State put up a temporary Court in the State Museum The doves of the Museum were as high pedigreed and as unflinching in courage as the Rajput soldiers While the case was going on, they would come in every few minutes into the Court and perch themselves on one or the other hangers and continue to coo with unabashed insistence As soon as they started their loud chorus counsel would stop in the middle of his argument and the servants of the State would rush in with long poles to drive away these unwanted guests It was regarded sacrilegious to injure the doves so that the servants could only keep on shooing them off all the time, keeping the ends of the poles at a respectable distance Some minutes would pass thus in driving them away, when the legal arguments would be resumed After a short interval, the whole episode would be repeated

During the course of the Inquiry, counsel on both sides visited the famous temple in order to find out whether the innumerable images in the temple were carved naked or dressed in a loin cloth The Inquiry thus went on for a considerable time To those who heard him, Munshi's performance both as a legal as well as a historical argument appeared to be one of his best Even Muni Jinvijayaji who was taking part in the enquiry against the Digambars admitted that Munshi's interpretation of the Jain *shastras* was a brilliant one The Civilian member of the Inquiry Committee complimented Munshi heartily and before he left for England informed Munshi that the Committee had decided in his favour

The Report of the Committee was at last submitted to the State In the meantime, the then Prime Minister died and with his death the report was shelved The State flag has been still flying on the flagstaff notwithstanding the

Inquiry and the Report Both the Digambars and the Svetambars waited to hear the contents of the Report The State managed to forget all about it The Report was published only in 1947 when Munshi was invited by the Maharana to be his honorary Constitutional Adviser The only result of the dispute between the two sects appears to have been the privilege that the Jain community had in spending lakhs of rupees to see a kind of gladiatorial fight between their prominent counsel to their full satifaction

About the year 1939 the new Income Tax Act with the establishment of Income Tax Tribunals opened out a new field for Munshi's talents The new tribunals, though limited in scope, have undoubtedly been able to check the vagaries of the Income Tax Department This kind of litigation specially was suited to the genius of Munshi From the time that the new tribunals came into being, he began to appear in a large number of Income Tax cases in several parts of the country and became almost a fixture in one or the other tribunals, for months at a stretch In the course of this branch of his practice his advice was sought by some of the wealthiest multi-millionaires in the country He appeared in some of the leading Income Tax cases in the High Courts and the Supreme Court, before which he conducted his last case in 1950

When Munshi came back to the Bar in 1941, he had to carry out his professional obligation to appear for some industrial concerns for which he held general retainers Complaints went up to Gandhiji when Munshi appeared against the INTUC in a case before the Industrial Court Gandhiji sent a message through Sardar requesting Munshi not to appear against labour The rest of the story might well be told in Munshi's own words —

"I explained to Sardar how I was regulating my

> professional activities As long as a lawyer was in practice, his professional obligations demanded that he should not deny his services to those who retained him, unless, for personal reasons, he could not do justice to their case Whatever happened, he could not go against those who were retaining him With regard to the INTUC, however, though I held it in great regard for it was both national and non-violent in character and played to no foreign tune, I agreed to abide by his wishes.
>
> "Later on, I placed the matter before Gandhiji himself, and though he would have liked me to accept his view, he let me have my way of regulating my practice So long as I had not decided to withdraw from practice, I could not abjure professional obligations Nor did he allow this difference to come in the way of his treating me with the old consideration I was grateful for this indulgence"

It was in this connection that Gandhiji wrote a letter to Sardar about Munshi The letter was in Gujarati and has recently been published The following is the English translation of the part referring to Munshi "Call him (Munshi) and tell him this, that if he appears at all, he should appear on behalf of labour, he cannot appear on behalf of mill-owners So far as I have understood him, he has resolved not to stick to the profession. He is out to serve the country, he would take a special case only if that was offered to him He would be blameworthy only if he started practice like other lawyers I clearly understood him to say that he was not going to be absorbed in his practice He has gone out of the Congress under the clear insistence of a moral duty Except for this, he belongs to the Congress In my opinion, by leaving the Congress he has become more of the Congress like me I have found

him to be straight-forward He understands things of the heart He has the spirit of self-sacrifice He keeps himself open to correction If that also be your impression of him, call him and talk to him frankly. We should conduct towards him as if he were a Congressman ''

6

CRUSADE FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

SHORTLY after the outbreak of the second World War, the Government of India armed themselves with extraordinary powers through the Defence of India Act When the 'Quit India' Movement was inaugurated in 1942 a number of new ordinances were promulgated under the guise of quelling a subversive movement The new ordinances threatened to throttle political life and public activity of any kind. The situation threw upon Munshi the burden of leading what became a veritable crusade in defence of personal liberty and political rights He and his team of juniors appeared practically throughout the country from Srinagar to Madras

In these sensational cases Munshi brought out not only his skill as a lawyer but often an element of smashing surprise One of the first of these cases was in connection with the warrant of arrest issued by the Allahabad High Court against Mr. B G Horniman, the famous editor of the *Bombay Sentinel*, for contempt of Court Munshi's contention was that the Allahabad High Court had no jurisdiction to issue such a warrant for contempt in other provinces Evidently, nobody had until then tried to issue

such a warrant and when this contention was placed before the Appellate Bench of the Bombay High Court it took every one concerned by surprise The High Court decided in favour of Munshi's contention and the judgement created quite a sensation in the country When the warrant was ultimately returned unexecuted, Horniman with characteristic promptness, wrote in the *Bombay Sentinel* that the Allahabad High Court would have to wait long before they got him to the United Provinces

Immediately after the arrest of the Congress leaders on 9th August, 1942, Munshi set up an organisation for the defence of every person connected with the Quit India Movement put up before the Police Courts in Bombay He also managed to get the Bombay High Court Bar Association to appoint a committee to go into the high-handedness of the authorities The expenses were mostly borne by Munshi himself He and the lawyers working in his chamber became a sort of office for public advice Apart from the number of important cases in which he himself appeared without fees, as in the case of Chimur, his juniors also conducted and interested themselves in several cases at his request and at nominal fees

One of the most sensational cases in which Munshi came to be briefed during this period was the famous case, popularly known as the *Tribune* Contempt Case The case was heard by the full bench of the Lahore High Court consisting of Chief Justice Sir Trevor Harris, Mr Justice Munir and Mr Justice Teja Singh Munshi assisted by several leaders of the Lahore Bar, appeared for the Respondents, while the Crown was represented by Sri Sleem, the Advocate-General of Lahore High Court

The charges of contempt against the Respondents fell under three headings —(1) for having published comments on the arrest of Sri A C Bali under the heading

"Arrest made on flimsy grounds" in the issue of the *Tribune* of 6th September 1943, (2) for having published the proceedings of the hearing of the *Habeas Corpus* petition filed by Sri P L Sondhi in Lahore High Court for the production of Sri Bali in the Court to be dealt with in accordance with the law and to which objection was taken, for having published the petition *in extenso* as also for having published observations attributed to Mr Justice Munir and the remark of Sri Anand, Advocate, that the arrest of Sri Bali was illegal, improper and *mala fide,* and (3) for having published the news item regarding the transfer application in Mr Justice Munir's Court under the heading "Lawyer insulted "

The political climate of the Punjab and the tense atmosphere of the Court are vividly portrayed by Munshi —

> "Before I attended the Court, the Bar was exercised over two questions first, whether Munshi the lawyer and Munshi the author were the same or different persons, and secondly, whether he would appear with a Gandhi cap, which had been prohibited within the Court premises by a notification
>
> "My host, Sir Manoharlal, then a minister and a trustee of the *Tribune,* was also anxious about my cap. When leaving for the Court, he gave me a mild hint as to the wisdom of my appearing in the Court in a Gandhi cap I said I would I think Bakshi Tekchand had told me about the notification and reminded me that several leading Congress lawyers left their Gandhi caps behind when they went to Court I told him that if any objection was taken to my cap, I would apply for an adjournment of the case till such time as the trustees of the *Tribune* were able to engage a lawyer whose headgear was more palatable to their Lordships

"The Punjab at that time was passing through not only one of its worst periods of Hindu-Muslim tension, but the authorities were also dealing with the 'Quit India' Movement with a heavy hand At such a time for a lawyer to appear with a Gandhi cap in defiance of the notification was quite unexpected

"The Court room was crowded to capacity I made my appearance and thanked the Chief Justice for permitting me to appear before the Court He was good enough to make a pleasant remark of welcome My cap stood the test

"For several days we went into the Law of Contempt of Court I soon discovered that the Chief Justice Sir Trevor Harris, was one of the greatest Judges before whom, I have the honour to appear in the course of my practice pleasant, informal, clear-headed, open-minded, courteous All in all I have never come across a better Judge in my life

"We waded through law report after law report, the pleasant remarks of the Chief Justice relieving the boredom of reading dull judgements, sometimes two centuries old

"To give but one instance When I referred to a law report, the Chief Justice said, 'There is only one copy in the Judges' Library, while in the Patna High Court from where I come, there were seven copies of each report, so that each Judge could have a copy for his own use '

" 'But surely, My Lord, the Punjab is a rich province,' I said

" 'The riches are not reflected in our library,' said the Chief Justice

" 'May be,' I replied, 'the wisdom of the Judges of this Court makes law-books a superfluity.'

"The Chief Justice had the habit of quietly grasping the principle underlying a case, and, after summarising it in precise terms, having the summary confirmed by me 'This is what you mean, is it not?' he would repeat again and again

"Justice Munir was naturally annoyed that somebody should have the temerity to question his judgment in the way I was doing He was comparatively a young Judge then

"One of the first principles which I had learnt as a raw junior at the Bombay Bar was never to be impatient or angry with the Judge, never to hit back at him, never to be upleasant, and never to sacrifice independence

"I had quite a few lapses from this standard in my forty-two years of practice But every time I had a lapse, I was sorry that I had not been able to find the right word to turn unpleasantness away

"Irrepressibly sarcastic, Justice Munir tried to find fault with every argument I advanced More than once he was annoyed with my English, justifiably perhaps, for my English is none to good

"I bore his comments as patiently as I could Ultimately, to one of his remarks on the language I had used, I replied with a low bow; 'My Lord, you know the handicaps under which all of us suffer. We have to express ourselves by means of a foreign tongue, and not having been to England for my Bar examination, as Your Lordship has had the good fortune to do, you will forgive me if my English does not come up to your Lordship's expectations '

"The atmosphere became a little tense A breeze was anticipated But Sir Trevor Harris rose to the occasion. 'Don't say that Mr Munshi You are very

modest We in England speak English, you in India learn English, and any day you speak it better than most of us Englishmen '

"On another occasion, Justice Munir asked me 'Why should the papers publish the comments of a Judge? For their own safety they should only publish judgements '

" 'If Your Lordship's view was accepted, the liberty of the Press would be in jeopardy and the meaning and purpose of proceedings in open court would be lost,' was my reply

" 'Justice is not a handmaid of journalists,' returned Justice Munir

" 'Neither, My Lord, is it a cloistered virtue that cannot stand the public gaze' I replied

"Soon the Chief Justice and Justice Teja Singh were in my favour A stage came when they themselves replied to all the objections that were raised by Justice Munir

"At the end of the argument our nerves became a little frayed Justice Munir observed with a touch of asperity 'If Bali comes before me again in a case like this one, I shall deal with him in the same manner '

"I bowed ceremoniously and said 'My Lord, Your Lordship is unjust to yourself With the volume of learning to which I have drawn Your Lordship's attention, I am sure the next time Your Lordship would find it difficult to do as you say you would '

"Later, I appeared before Justice Munir in one or two other cases I was glad to find that my impression of him in this case was just a passing experience For instance, in a long argument in a very difficult

> case which went on before him for weeks, I found him both pleasant and patient. And no quality in a Judge is more indispensable than that of which the tedium of a long and boring case can be made enjoyable.
>
> "The *Tribune* case ended in a majority judgement in my favour, Munir J dissenting. The Full Bench judgements are reported in AIR 1942, Lahore, page 329. The judgement of the Chief Justice is a leading authority on this branch of the law."

The *Habeas Corpus* petition of Sri Jai Prakash Narain was another sensational brief that Munshi took up during this critical period. The application was heard before a Division Bench of Lahore High Court consisting of Chief Justice Sir Trevor Harris and Mr Justice Abdul Rehman. Sri Jai Prakash Narain had been originally detained under Rule 26 of the Defence of India Rules. When a *Habeas Corpus* application on his behalf was filed by Sri H R Pardiwala of the Bombay Bar, the Lahore Police arrested Pardiwala himself on the very day he filed his client's petition. The Government of the Punjab, perhaps finding that it could not resist the petition, sought relief in the old and obsolete Regulation III of 1818 and declared Sri Jai Prakash Narain a state prisoner. This took away the jurisdiction of the Court to interfere in the case.

Arising out of this application was the case of Sri Pardiwala who, as I have already stated, had gone to Lahore with Munshi's own personal notes to Sri Jeewanlal Kapur (then practising lawyer of the Lahore High Court, now a Judge in the Supreme Court) and other friends to file the *Habeas Corpus* petition on behalf of Sri Jai Prakash Narain. After filing the petition when Sri Pardiwala came out of the High Court building he was arrested and detained under Rule 26 for about three days in jail by the

Lahore Police under harassing conditions This created a first class scandal throughout the whole country

While Munshi was on his way to Lahore for arguing the case of Sri Jai Prakash Narain, he realised that there was no case to argue, In fact he had declined to proceed to Lahore but Sri Pardiwala and some friends, wanted him to go on with the case even if for no other purpose than to submit that there was no case In the train, Munshi drafted a petition against the D I G, C I D, of the Punjab and the Superintendent, C I D as also the Inspector for arresting Sri Pardiwala while discharging his duty as a lawyer and foi withholding from the High Court of Lahore his *Habeas Corpus* petition made while he was in jail

When Munshi went to the Lahore High Court he applied for a rule for contempt against the three officers mentioned in the petition drafted by him This surprising move fell like a bombshell for the Punjab police who had at that time managed to acquire a sinister reputation

When Munshi went again to argue the application, all the three officers concerned did not even care to remain present in Court When the question arose as to when Sri Pardiwala's petition to the Court for *Habeas Corpus* sent from the jail was dated, the Advocate General stated that he would make inquiries from the second Respondent, Robinson Munshi promptly drew the court's attention to the offensive attitude of the three Respondents in not being present in a quasi-criminal case The Chief Justice was annoyed and the three officers were immediately summoned As soon as they arrived they instructed their counsel to say that the petition had been destroyed Fortunately, Sri Pardiwala had all throughout maintained a diary, in which he had noted that he had submitted his *Habeas Corpus* application on a particular date

The Court then gave liberty to Munshi to ask questions to these officers Superintendent Robinson was more or less regarded as a power in Lahore and had never before in his life gone through the gruelling experience of being cross-examined on his own conduct

Munshi You had the petition of *Habeas Corpus* and the letter addressed to your superior, the D I G

Answer Yes

Question You tore up both the petition and the letter

A Yes

Q For how many years have you been in the Police Force?

(The Superintendent gave the number)

Q Is it the practice in the Punjab Police Force for a subordinate officer to tear off the letters addressed to his superior?

The Superintendent tried to evade the question but Munshi insisted on reply and the Chief Justice who had noted the none-too-humble attitude of the officer registered a stern warning to the witness The question was again asked and the answer was "No It is not"

Q Is it not a rule of the Police Force that every letter addressed to your superior must be forwarded to him?

A Yes

Q Why then did you tear up the letter to the D I G?

The Superintendent could simply mutter "I think I was foolish"

The Superintendent and the Inspector were ordered to pay a fine of Rs 50 each and the Court gave a stern warning to the Police not to trifle with petitions made by detenus to the High Court On the other charge it was

held that Sri Pardiwala at the time he was arrested was discharging his duty as counsel

The case of Pardiwala created quite a furore in the Punjab and the Police felt extremely crestfallen The Superintendent was soon after transfered from Lahore

Sri Shiva Kumar Shastri, Barrister-at-law then practising in the Lahore High Court, wrote in 1946 his impressions of Munshi's first appearance in the High Court of Lahore that the management of the *Tribune* after great deliberation had decided to brief Munshi and that "by that decision something like history was made"

"Munshi's name was not unfamiliar to us in the Punjab but he had done so many things in life that very few of us knew exactly the number or range of his activities and accomplishments He is a lawyer of great standing, one would say According to another, he was a novelist and dramatist of great repute A third would remark with some heat that the Munshi he knew was a profound scholar in ancint Indian History and knew Sanskrit like the sages of old A fourth would inquire meekly if the Munshi that was coming over was not the one who had recently started the Akhand Hindustan movement and had actually been to Lahore in that connection The first would nod his head wisely and say 'Why not? He was also a very successful Home Minister in the late Congress Ministry in Bombay Lawyers take to politics as a duck to water '

"The second would say, 'May be But I still insist that Munshi is primarily a novelist and a dramatist, that is, a man of literature He is famous in the literary circles of India Perhaps he took to law and politics as a side line'

"The first would say, 'Don't be absurd' How can law be a side line? It is a jealous mistress. A lawyer

may take interest in other things, but he cannot humanly specialise in any other thing I should know I am a lawyer'

"The third would say, 'Nevertheless, I maintain that if Munshi had specialised in anything it is in the history and culture of India You can feel it by listening to him I should know I have talked to him'

"The fourth would say, 'Hasn't it occurred to anyone that there may be different savants answering to the same name? One may indeed be a specialist in history, the other might be a literary man and the third a lawyer'

"The first would say, 'Yes, that is a sensible view' The second would say, 'But I thought we were talking about the same man' The fourth would say, 'How can you, if you keep on describing him differently?'

"I was frequently coming across views of this kind Naturally, I was interested to know more about a man who was being acclaimed on different sides as a specialist on more subjects than one I read some of his published works in English I also came to know something about his status in Gujarati literature

"For the moment, however, I and other members of the legal profession were concerned wholly with the fate of the impending proceedings against the Tribune and thought of Munshi in no other capacity except that of an eminent lawyer on whose ability and advocacy we would have a chance to form a conclusion of our own

"The events I am recalling occurred about three years ago (1946) Yet they are fresh in my mind Watching Munshi develop his arguments in Courts, one felt at once that one was confronted with a powerful and fearless personality having a splendid intellect and a profoundly judicial mind His grasp of facts seemed thorough, his background of law masterly, and his logic penetrating and

irresistible In a firm yet restrained language he would formulate his points, rebuking where rebuke was called for and at times conceding with a grace that disarmed all opposition and dissent He would put new light and clarity on old and well established principles of law and the judicial decisions on which they rested There was no assertion of his which could be regarded merely as a debating point and which could not be backed up by the strictest requirements of law and equity He never said anything that was redundant or superfluous

"Therefore, whatever he said carried conviction "

"The result was a triumph for Munshi Then the litigant public of the Punjab literally fell over him Brief after brief came to him He could not accept them all Nevertheless his visits to Lahore became quite frequent Each case in which he was briefed ended in his triumph and in victory for those that engaged him His 'mofussil' practice was already extending beyond the confines of his own province It seemed that the Punjab was also being annexed to that wide area

"The Executive and the Police of our Province began to sit up and take notice They had got used to acting arbitrarily and with an insufferable arrogance The absence of any vigorous protest on the one hand and the omnibus character of the Defence of India Rules on the other had bred in them that absence of vigilence which leads inevitably to an abuse of authority Two cases which Munshi argued gave them a well-needed jolt from this complacency In one, a Superintendent of Police of the C I D. was found guilty of technical contempt because he had been responsible for withholding the transmission to the High Court of an *Habeas Corpus* petition by a detained person on the fatuous plea that, in his opinion, it had become infructuous The Court held that it was no business of any official to

form any conclusion about an application addressed to the Court This case is reported in A I R 1944, Lahore 196

"The other case dealt with the ambit and scope of Rule 129 of the Defence of India Rules For some time this rule had become a kind of Santa Claus to the Police It allowed them to detain a person on mere suspicion Inevitably it had come to be misused In this case (reported in A I R 1944, Lahore, 373) the accused persons had been detained under this rule not to ensure a more efficient prosecution of the war but to ensure a more efficient investigation into, and therefore a successful prosecution of their alleged crime of cheating. This was a gross abuse of Rule 129 and was held as such.

"During this time I came to know Munshi intimately I soon discovered that behind the alert and eminent lawyer there was a deep thinker That gave a special significance to his views on politics".

In August 1942 the villages of Chimur and Ramtek drew countrywide attention by certain Government officers having been killed by the mobs there and by their having indulged in arson and looting Some of the Draconian measures adopted by the Government of the Central Provinces immediately after these incidents made the situation in that Province more bitter than ever Stories of rape committed on women in these villages, looting of houses and various other persecutions by the soldiers, magistrates and police stationed there spread like wild fire, giving rise to tremendous indignation throughout the country

In Ramtek, a small town near Nagpur, the Government Treasury was looted by a mob In Chimur some members of the public had taken out a Prabhat Pheri The Police as usual in those days had thought fit to stop it by a lathi charge. The upshot of such tactless behaviour on the part of the Police was only to increase the number of

persons in the procession. The procession wended its way to the Dak Bungalow where a Govenment officer had put up the previous evening Unfortunately the officer concerned lost his presence of mind. Seeing the crowd coming into the Bungalow but only to scare the crowd away he shouted to his chaprasi to bring him his gun Then the tragedy happened The crowd thought that the officer instead of listening to their complaint was about to shoot them down and in their excitement fell on the officer who was about to run into another room In the fight that took place the officer was done to death Some of the police officers started shooting at the crowd and then began running for a neighbouring town The crowd followed in order to stop them from securing help The policemen shot down some members of the crowd; the crowd disarmed some of the policemen and killed some others

After the incident was over the villagers realising what was to be their lot went out in all directions, felled a good number of trees from the road sides and blocked the roads leading to the village

Almost identical events took place in Ashti, a prosperous town near Wardha with a population of about three to four thousand souls Two or three days prior to the unfortunate events that happened there, it was openly announced by the local people that a procession would be taken out in the morning Express directions were issued to those intending to join the procession not to carry with them any lathi or stick Evidence in the Ashti case made it clear beyond doubt that certain persons who came to Ashti from the neighbouring villages were actually asked to lay aside their sticks before entering the village

When the procession started it contained no more than three hundred persons shouting Congress slogans and was preceded by a person holding aloft the tricolour flag

The thana had an Inspector of Police, who had kept himself and his five constables ready, armed with rifles As the procession came near the compound gates the processionists, who were till then quite orderly, were met by the Inspector He took the leaders to the verandah to discuss matters The leaders were trying to persuade the Inspector to permit them to hoist the national flag on the Police thana While these talks were going on, one among the constables who were standing on two sides of the building started all of a sudden firing at the crowd which was squatting in the compound in a quiet and orderly fashion A few of them were injured and a Muslim youth who happened to belong to a Nawab's family died.

The crowd dispersed immediately and the processionists out of sheer fright ran back to the town That was the end of the procession An hour or so later another crowd, this time much stronger, came back to the thana to fetch the dead and the injured The Inspector perhaps thought that the public would parade the dead and the injured through the town and believing that it might perhaps lead to more serious trouble immediately sent one of the constables for assistance from the nearby town, closed the compound gates and obstinately refused either to deliver the injured or to give any medical help to them Some of the members of the crowd had by this time gone mad with fury owing to their comrades being either killed or injured as a result of the firing Even in such wild fury some of them did not forget to go to the Police quarters and escort the wives and children of the Inspector and the constables safely to the village

Even then perhaps nothing worse would have happened had the Inspector not run amuck Going about here and there, shooting wildly at the crowd, he came near the compound gate where the greater part of the crowd wa

still standing and shot down a young man standing near the dispensary opposite The crowd thinking that others might likewise be shot at, fell on the Inspector and did him to death Once the crowd had seen red, the rest of the constables too met with the same fate The constable who had first started firing in the morning on the peaceful crowd was found in the evening and he also shared the fate of his colleagues

The trials were scheduled to take place in October 1942 Special judges were appointed under the Special Criminal Courts Ordinance to try these cases Smt Jankidevi Bajaj had sent a messenger to Bombay and asked Munshi to take up the defence in these cases Munshi himself with Sri A C Amin went to defend the accused in the Chimur case and sent Sri J H Dave and me for the Ashti case

Both the cases were lengthy affairs, and occupied two months Dr Kedar of the Nagpur Bar also joined us in the Ashti case after some time

While we were comfortably lodged in the Bajaj Wadi at Wardha, Munshi had to stay in Chanda where no arrangement worth the name was made for his stay It was amusing to see Munshi with his junior living in one room on the ground floor a building, which until his arrival was used as a shop selling miscellaneous wares Possibly none in the town could invite so dangerous a person as counsel for the accused in the Chimur case

Before the Chimur trial was over Munshi was asked to attend to the application in the High Court of Nagpur for a writ of *Habeas Corpus* (*Sitao, Jholia and others* v *King Emperor*, A I R 1943, Nagpur, 36), challenging the validity of the Special Criminal Courts Ordinance of 1942 and the Special Courts established thereunder. The application was heard by that distinguished Judge Mr. Jus-

tice Niyogi and Mr Justice Digby. The two judges gave differing judgements and ultimately the application was heard by Chief Justice Grill. Appearing on behalf of the applicants Munshi raised the question that the Ordinance was *ultra vires* of the Governor-General, that it was not retrospective and did not apply to incidents which took place before it was passed. Mr Justice Niyogi delivered a very learned and scholarly judgement in favour of the applicants. Mr Justice Digby, however, gave a differing judgement. On this difference the Chief Justice as the third judge held most of the applicants' contentions untenable and dismissed the application.

This was the first attempt in the country to attack the validity of the Ordinance, a piece of legislation which in those days was more hated by the public than any other. Finding this application as a precedent many a lawyer in other Courts in the country filed such applications. The controversy was decided by the Federal Court holding the obnoxious Ordinance invalid.

Owing to the provisions of the Ordinance to dispose of cases as summary trials, many, if not all, salutary rules of criminal jurisprudence were thrown overboard. The identification parades in these cases as in all other cases where a mass of people were concerned as accused were scarcely unimpeachable. The testimony of the prosecution witnesses when put to the test of cross-examination was hardly of a nature that would be called dependable. The Ordinance allowed the Special Judges to take down a mere memorandum of evidence led before them. In fact the accused were seated far away beyond hearing in the Chimur case when the memorandum was taken down.

Mr. Wickendon, I C S, the Special Judge, was described by Munshi to me to be as conscientious as Mr Justice Broomfield and as quick as Chief Justice Macleod,

with an attitude which considered the Bar as entirely unnecessary and the Empire as being in danger The great tial of Chimur had afforded the Judge also the opportunity for some display of the armed might of the British Raj All throughout the sittings the Judge used to keep armed guards round the Chanda Court and an armed officer behind him

We met a batch of these young prisoners at Wardha Station at midnight When we tried to express our polite regrets for the extreme sentence awarded to them we met with the reply "If the Japanese had invaded our Motherland and if there had been a national government we would have joined the armed forces and would have been called upon to make this very sacrifice There is a war going on in the country for freedom and the trials and the penalties are merely the consequences of that war."

The Chimur case became more well-known in the country than the Ashti case, owing to Prof Bhansali having undertaken a fast and determined not to swerve from his resolve till the C P Government promised to hold an independent inquiry into the cases of alleged rape in Chimur

It might be remembered that during this period of Prof Bhansali's great ordeal it was due to the publicity carried on by Munshi through public lectures and articles in the Press that the attention of the country was focussed on the problems of Chimur He was in no small measure responsible for the victory of Prof Bhansali

About this time Munshi came to be briefed on behalf of the Acharya of the well-known Swami Narayan Sect in Gujarat, the headquarters of which were at Vadtal I happened to be briefed as his junior in this case The case as originally filed was a small affair in the Court at Borsad, a small town in Gujarat But in the course of

the trial it acquired a tremendous importance by reason of the Court having to go into the religious doctrines preached by the rival parties

For about the last half a century certain dissentient religious doctrines had been preached by the defendants in the case The defendants insisted upon being called sadhus of the Swami Narayan Sect and asserted their right to go to the various temples belonging to the diocese of Vadtal and preach their heterodox doctrines The Acharya therefore filed a suit against them for an injunction to restrain them from going into the temples and for a declaration that the defendant and his followers were not the followers of Swami Narayan and were not entitled to the benefit of the Vadtal temple and its subsidiary temples

The first defendant who was the leader of the dissentient party had, during fifty years or so, undoubtedly acquired considerable influence as a religious preacher and in rivalry with the diocese of Vadtal had built a number of temples in the various villages in Gujarat It had therefore become necessary for the authorities of the Vadtal temple to put an end to the efforts of this rival sect to use its temples

Munshi's elaborate argument was a discourse on the evolution of the monotheism of the *Gita* culminating in the latter day doctrines of Swami Narayan He took the central doctrine of *avatara* and *kshara* and *akshara purusha* from the *Gita*, raced their evolution through the *Bhagvat*, Sri Ramanuja's writings, and the *Vasudeva Mahatmya* in the *Skanda Purana* to Swami Narayan who gave them a peculiar emphasis in his discourses and was accepted as the *avatara* of Sri Krishna He also traced the evolution of the doctrines of the other sect to establish how they were destructive of the founder's doctrine He then dealt with the law in support of his contention that the members of

a sect who do not accept the founder's doctrines are not entitled to the benefit of the foundation In preparation, marshalling and presentation, his address in the Borsad case to my mind, is one of his most brilliant performances

We won the Swami Narayan Case The appeal from the decision was dismissed and the other side allowed their second appeal to the High Court to be dismissed also.

In 1937 he had a similar case of a different sect. He appeared for the Mullaji Saheb of the Dawoodi Borah community and traced the evolution of the doctrine of the representative character of Mullaji Saheb from the days of the Prophet It was in such cases that Munshi's scholarship and forensic ability excelled

The most brilliant performance of Munshi which I saw was his argument in the "Demonetisation Ordinance" case The Government of India issued an Ordinance stopping the cashing of Rs 1,000 notes after a certain date In Munshi's opinion, this ordinance did not exonerate the Reserve Bank from its I O U liability as the promiser A mandamus petition was filed, and heard by Mr Justice Kania, Munshi had a few hours with leading financiers and carried on research in the origin and development of the Bank promissory notes from the earliest days of the Bank of England His arguments before the Original and in the Appeal Court consisting of Sir Leonard Stone, C J., and Lokur J , was a marvel of precision and presentation, which richly deserved the learned Chief Justice's comments "brilliant and exhaustive" The petition nonetheless failed

Munshi has always maintained that the senior's chamber where juniors and pupils came to learn should be like a Hindu joint family pivoting round the senior. His relations with his devils have not been merely professional On a young lawyer entering his chambers,

Munshi's relations immediately became personal, and the newcomer was not only extended a cordial and enthusiastic welcome from his Guru but was received as a member of his family Apart from his concern for the junior's professional rise, Munshi was always anxious to help his devils in every difficulty Even an ordinary illness of one of them made him extremely concerned Any of his juniors could approach him without fear of disappointment for solution of a legal difficulty in the busiest of his busy time Many a time he re-wrote the draft of a pleading drawn by his devil for himself Apart from his personal interest the junior began to share in the manifold activities that were ceaselessly going on in the chamber Each of the devils was given a directive share in the various activities, educational, social or political, in which Munshi was interested

Amongst the many young men who have come into Munshi's close contact during his legal career, one of the more prominent was Sri Purshottam Trikamdas Inspite of deep differences in political outlook, both of them have maintained relations of mutual affection

It was a piece of happy coincidence that Munshi came to argue Sri Purshottam's own Habeas Corpus petition filed by him while he was in detention as a result of the Quit India Movement

After the passing of the 'Quit India' Resolution of the 8th August 1942 some of the left wing Congressmen in the city of Bombay went underground under the leadership of Sri Purshottam Sri Purshottam, or P T, as he is popularly known amongst his intimates, successfully evaded the Bombay C I D for a long time He was ultimately arrested on November 19, 1942 at Bandra On December 2, 1942 the Government of Bombay passed an order detaining him under Rule 26 of the Defence of India

Rules and transferred him to the Lahore Central Jail. The Government of Bombay by another order dated the 22nd of December 1942 passed an order 'in supersession of the previous order' authorising the Inspector-General of Police, Punjab, to detain P T in any jail in the Punjab

Late in 1945 when P T was transferred to Yervada Jail after having experienced life in a couple of jails in the Punjab, in solitary confinement in one of them, the Government sought further to continue his detention under the Restriction and Detention Ordinance of 1944 He sent in an Habeas Corpus petition to the High Court of Bombay Munshi's eye caught the fatal defect in the order The Government had been continuing a superseded order and keeping P T in jail unlawfully

Munshi argued the petition on behalf of P T before a Division Bench of the High Court of Bombay packed with the Advocates and friends of P T The contentions of the petitioner were upheld by the Court and P T was there and then set at liberty No one in the vast crowd was gladder to see him again at liberty than his Guru

7

THE PUSHPA CASE

THE Tribune Contempt Case and Sri Pardiwala's *Habeas Corpus* application created quite a stir in India at the time for more reasons than one The judgement in the Contempt Case endorsing Munshi's exposition of the Law of Contempt is a leading authority on this branch of law Moreover, in view of the political situation in the

Punjab these two cases and their outcome were entwined with the struggle for freedom

Munshi, however, considers three of the cases in which he appeared to be his most outstanding performances They are the Pushpa Case, the Ratlam Conspiracy and the Lakshmikantam Murder Case

The first dealt with the law of marriages among the Hindus The second was a political conspiracy case where the accused were charged with trying to overthrow the Government of the then Ratlam State The third, was a murder trial One took place at Bombay, another at Ratlam and the third at Madras But they had three things in common In the beginning it looked as if the case for Munshi's clients stood no chance of success at all Secondly, each case created a great deal of sensation, and, thirdly, there was an element of surprise in each by which Munshi obtained success for his clients

The Pushpa case had created, even before the case started, excitement in the community to which the parties belonged Pushpa was the daughter of a rich merchant in Bombay At a very tender age she was attracted to a boy of her own caste who was alleged to have induced her to leave her house and the custody of her parents They went through some kind of marriage in a chawl at Parel in Bombay and immediately left for Poona

The parents made a search for the girl and through the assistance of some friends, induced her to return to their house Her running away had given a great shock and distress to her orthodox parents However they promised the boy that if she was still willing to go and stay with him they would raise no objection

On her return when she saw the distress of her parents, she realised the folly of her impulsive action and declined to go to the young man The young man was given a

chance to see the girl again but the girl was adamant and even refused to have any talk with him

The young man immediately started guardianship proceedings against the girl whom he called his wife In these proceedings a compromise was arrived at as a result of which the father of the girl had to give the young man the costs of the proceedings Under this compromise the young man was again to be given an opportunity to see the girl and it was agreed that if he succeeded in winning her back the parents would consent to her being regularly married to him Though the young man failed to win her, he filed a suit in the High Court of Bombay for a declaration that there was a valid and binding marriage between him and the girl

Munshi was instructed to appear on behalf of the girl. In the initial stages the case had acquired an unpleasant notoriety by reason of a general feeling that rich and orthodox parents were breaking up the romance of the two young lovers Munshi, the high priest of romance, had made a condition before accepting the brief that he would appear only if the girl independently of any parental influence, convinced him that she wanted to resist the alleged marriage

This she did Heaps of letters written by the girl and the boy to each other added to the curiosity already prevailing not only in the community but even amongst outsiders The young people had gone through a marriage ceremony of which the plaintiff had managed to have photographs taken The plaintiff brought several eye witnesses to the marriage ceremony There was evidence too that both the young people had gone and lived together for two days at Poona

In the course of the case, when the letters were read, Mr Justice Chagla, as he then was, remarked, "Mr Mun-

shi, your books seem to be responsible for these love letters" Munshi promptly replied, "I can't disown responsibility, My Lord, for introducing romance in Gujarati life"

In the beginning Munshi tried his utmost to induce the plaintiff to leave the girl to herself particularly as she had declined to have anything to do with him At one stage on behalf of the girl's parents he offered a considerable sum by way of costs if the plaintiff agreed to have the suit dismissed, but he would not give any money for the boy himself While these negotiations were going on Munshi had come to the conclusion that the young man was after all not a perfect Romeo and that the financial side of the marriage was not totally out of consideration By this time the girl had made it perfectly clear that even if she was declared to be the wedded wife of this young man she would never go back to him

The main question in the case was whether the parties had gone through the marriage ceremony which the Hindu law prescribed Munshi had prepared himself with all the texts prescribing the details of the necessary ceremonies He got his chance when the sealed bundles containing the photographs of the marriage ceremony were opened He immediately detected in the photographs what had escaped the attention of almost every one concerned in the case

He cross-examined the plaintiff at great length on all aspects of the case except the marriage ceremony itself At one stage even the learned Judge asked Munshi as to why he did not at once come to the ceremony part of the case After two days' cross-examination Munshi looked at the clock It was about 40 minutes before the recess when he let himself go He did not want his opponent to have any opportunity for re-examining him after the recess Commencing this part of the cross-examination

Munshi asked: "And all the ceremonies were performed?"

Ans "Yes"

Question "What were the ceremonies?"

The plaintiff had prepared himself well and described the ceremonies supposed to have been performed in all details

Munshi encouraged him to give all the details of the rituals, and the plaintiff who was ready with such details was chuckling at the gaps in the examination-in-chief being filled in by the opposite Counsel by leading questions The young man had given complete details of the ceremony as the *shastras* prescribed

Then came the next series of the questions

Q "Where was Varuna i e, the brass *lota* with the coconut?"

A· "In front of us"

Q "I take it that the sacred fire was on the *Chori* (little mud platform). I take it that it was burning in front of you and the defendant"

A· "Yes"

Q "I take it that the size was the usual one about five by five inches?"

A· "Yes"

Q "The fire I take it was burning all throughout the ceremony?"

A "Yes"

Q I assume that the fire was kept burning by ghee being poured in it at intervals during all the forty-five minutes of the marriage ceremony?"

A "Yes"

Q "Are you sure that the fire was burning throughout the ceremony?"

A· "Certainly, yes"

Munshi looked up at the clock It was exactly 1-30

p m , half an hour was still to go for the recess. He took up the photograph of the marriage ceremony and presented it to the young plaintiff

Q ''Will you show to the Court in this photograph where the fire is and where the Varuna (brass *lota* with coconut) is placed?''

The plaintiff looked at the photograph, saw the blunder he had committed and was immediately taken aback The photograph only showed a glass tumbler in front of the wedding pair There was no brass *lota* and no mud platform

''Where is the fire?'' he was asked to point it in the photograph

The plaintiff was like a drowning man willing to clutch at anything available He spotted in the photograph something white near the sari of the bride and pointed it out as the fire

Munshi got him to mark the spot with blue pencil and asked ''You are sure it is the fire before which you married '' He said, ''Yes ''

Then Munshi sat down There was some re-examination and the plaintiff's evidence came to a close

Another witness followed who again elaborately described the paraphernalia of the sacrificial fire but had no other alternative except to repeat that the white spot in the photograph near the sari of the bride represented the sacrificial fire

After the recess Munshi brought a microscope and pointed out to the learned judge that what was pointed out as fire in the photograph was nothing but a flower which had dropped down on the sari of the bride There was no fire, and no marriage.

The defence called a photographic expert who deposed to the absence of the fire in the photograph After

the examination of the expert the plaintiff completely collapsed and immediately gave up the case

As the Court rose, the plaintiff shouted at Munshi "You have converted a wife into a sister!"

8

THE KACHAURI CASE

Munshi always refers to the Ratlam Conspiracy Case as the *Kachauri* Case *Kachauri* is a delicacy peculiar to Gujarat and Rajasthan With the novelist's flair for the melodramatic touch, Munshi insists that his eating a *kachauri* was the deciding factor in the case, slurring over the fact that his position in the political world and his legal eminence could not but have brought the case to a successful conclusion His narrative of the case is interesting as it re-captures the atmosphere in the Indian States which have now become a relic of the past

> "The manner in which I undertook, argued and won the "Kachauri" case was more fantastic—believe it or not—than anything in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera
>
> "In the middle of December 1941, Kanaiyalal Vaidya, an office-bearer of the States Peoples' Congress, brought me a letter from Gandhiji It asked me to appear on behalf of the appellants in the conspiracy case, then before the Privy Council of Ratlam, a small princely state now merged in Madhya Bharat 'By advocacy you can only achieve what is possible', wrote Gandhiji, 'but by your going there the poor prisoners will find some comfort Meet the

officers there and spread the cult of mercy even by going out of your (professional) field'

"The case was fixed—I think—for December 20th, I may be in error by a day or two

"In this case seven or eight persons, including a local doctor and lawyer, had been tried, convicted and sentenced, some to no less than seven years' rigorous imprisonment The charges against them included the charge of attempting to overthrow the lawfully-established Government of His Highness the Maharaja Sajjan Singh of Ratlam One of the accused had died in jail The people were terror-stricken The Praja Mandal was practically dead No local lawyer had the courage to come forward to defend the accused Even a Bombay lawyer who had come to defend the accused in the Sessions Court had to leave Ratlam in a hurry because of a threat conveyed to him The less said about the nature of this threat the better

"With these words, Kanaiyalal flung at me—no other word is appropriate—a huge pile of papers The judgment—thank God—was in English The depositions of dozens of witnesses and scores of the documents were in Hindi, not typed or well-written, but scrawled in those hieroglyphics which each individual writer of Hindi invents for himself when he begins to write the Devanagari script without the top-line

"I was in despair I had to be in Idar to conduct a heavy appeal the day following the date on which the Ratlam case was fixed How on earth was I going to do the two heavy cases at the same time? And how was I going to wade through this huge pile

of indecipherable documents? But Gandhiji's wishes were always commands

"I wired to the Maharaja of Ratlam—I did not know him personally then—to grant me an adjournment of the case In a few hours the reply came that no adjournment would be granted

"I then wired to His Highness to be kind enough to accommodate me in the State Guest House The next day came the reply The State Guest House was not available, but accommodation was reserved for me in a hotel with the distinguished name of 'Savoy'.

"I also contacted on the phone Moolji Sheth, the proprietor of the Sajjan Mills at Ratlam, who was a great friend of mine. He had considerable influence with His Highness and knew Ratlam inside out I had committed a mistake in taking up this brief, he said No one in Ratlam could associate himself with the defence. The State was determined to dismiss the appeal A trial had only been staged because there was an uproar in the Press and the Resident wanted conviction in proper form But, as a result of my telegram, His Hightness had personally come to the Savoy Hotel and seen to it that rooms were reserved for me

"I sought the assistance of J M. Shelat, one of my ablest juniors—we call them 'devils' in Bombay —now Judge of Bombay High Court, and handed him the file of papers in the case

"On the morning of the 20th—I will take that as the date—Shelat and I arrived in Ratlam Moolji Sheth was at the station to receive me, so was Kanaiyalal No one else was there, not even the *munim* of a leading Marwari firm, who for years had never fail-

ed to bring me a hot cup of milk whenever I passed through the Ratlam station by the Frontier Mail. Evidently the authorities had made it plain to Ratlam that I was as much an 'untouchable' as my clients had been during the trial. His Highness, however, had been good enough to place a car at my disposal.

"In spite of all this, Kanaiyalal had secured the services of two lawyers from Indore to help me. But when we went into our first consultation, the prospect appeared dismal beyond words. We were told that His Highness was a good-natured and soft-hearted man, but the British Resident had dropped a hint that something must be done about the Praja Mandal leaders. The Maharaja had therefore entrusted the affairs to Shivji, his Defence Minister, who, charged with this all-important commission, had outdone himself. Local lawyers were prevented from appearing for the accused and the entire machinery of the State had worked to secure their conviction. During the trial of the case, no member of the public had been allowed to pass by the Court premises and the trial had lasted for a whole year. Bail not having been granted, the accused had been in jail all the time and one of them had died. The judgement of the Sessions Court, I was told, had been written by an Indore lawyer under the direction of the Home Minister of the State himself. One of the accused had drawn the portrait of the first accused and that had been sufficient evidence to convict him.

"Shivji, the central figure in the prosecution, belonged to that caste, which has for generations supplied trusted palace adherents to the princes of Saurashtra and their families. In the Sirohi case, a few years later, I learnt how the grandparents of Shivji

had come to Ratlam with a Saurashtra princess who was to be married to the ruler

"Shivji was the confidant and life-long companion of His Highness, also his comrade on the battle-fronts of World War I and on the innumerable polo-grounds where His Highness had led Indian teams to victory However, Shivji had not wasted his youth in receiving much in the way of education He had been brought up with the Maharaja, was loyal to him to the core, and was the only person upon whom His Highness could implicitly rely Shivji was a mighty person, for, he rarely forgot that, by virtue of the Maharaja's confidence, he had absolute rights over the people of Ratlam

"The hotel in which we were lodged belonged to Shivji Spies were all over the place It was impossible to hold consultations without some obliging waiter hovering about us The situation was to the last degree intriguing

"I secured an immediate appointment with the Dewan, a retired officer of the U P cadre, who was politeness itself

" 'I feel very proud, Mr Munshi, that you are going to appear before me', he said 'I once had the honour of having Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru argue a case before me'

" 'I never had the honour to appear with or against Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru in a court of law', I replied, not to be behind-hand in courtesy 'But I am proud that I am appearing before a judge in whose court Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru once appeared'

"Then I told the Dewan the plight I was in I could not do justice to the case in the four or five

days that had been given to me for its preparation. I wanted an adjournment

" 'I cannot give you any adjournment, whatever happens', he said

" 'Then you must make your choice', I said. 'You know that the case has created a sensation in the Press I am appearing for the accused at the instance of Gandhiji If you do not give me time to read my brief, I shall ask for an adjournment in open Court. If you still refuse to give me an adjournment, I shall withdraw from the case altogether This—your refusal—will be advertised all over the country and I assure you that neither the Ratlam Government nor the Court will come out well of the encounter'

"My argument went home The Dewan thought for a while 'Look here, Mr Munshi', he said, 'we are in a difficulty On the 1st of January, if the appeal is not disposed of by us, it will go before a joint bench under a new arrangement So whatever happens, we are determined to decide this case before the 31st of December'

"I grasped his point, the case was too bad to go before an outside bench

" 'I am not here to inconvenience you', I said 'Give me an adjournment for five days I shall finish my case at Idar and return to Ratlam And I promise you that even if it takes whole days and nights we will finish the appeal before the 30th. You can then deliver your judgment on the 31st' The Dewan agreed

"In the evening I paid my courtesy call on His Highness His mother having come from Saurashtra, he spoke Gujarati fluently Our conversation revolved round polo, of which I knew next to nothing

He showed me with pride the trophies which he had won in tournaments all over the world His Highness impressed me considerably I was sure that if he had had the choice, he would not have made his people unhappy

"I wanted to call on Shivji, the formidable Defence Minister also, but he had gone on a tour

"The same evening we left for Idar With the assistance of a Hindi-speaking assistant, Shelat began to struggle bravely with the record His knowledge of Hindi was even more limited than mine, for it extended only to the Sanskrit words common to Hindi and Gujarati—what may be termed the basic national language North Indians do not seem to appreciate this fact, but the only element in Hindi which has led us to accept it as our National Language is the Sanskrit vocabulary

"Shelat—my 'devil' for some years—had mastered the technique of wading through many ponderous briefs of mine and making accurate notes in a manner suited to my requirements Many a time I have conducted long cases with the aid of his notes, as he well knew the processes of my mind While I was busy with the Idar case, I thoroughly enjoyed his frantic efforts, morning, noon and night, to evolve some sense out of that prolix record

"As soon as I had finished the Idar case, he began to spoon-feed me from his notes This process continued that same evening at Idar, as also in the train and during the four-hour halt in the bug-ridden waiting room at Baroda where we changed trains for Ratlam When we reached our destination, we had scarcely a wink of sleep, my eyes were burning and my body aching

"On our return to Shivji's Hotel in Ratlam, the atmosphere had changed a little. Some Gujarati residents were waiting for me with garlands. Moolji Sheth told me that the lawyers wanted to attend the Court to hear me, would I please make some arrangement for them? I conveyed a message to the lawyers to apply in a body to the Dewan for permission to attend the Court The application was granted

"Immediately we were faced with—what is called in the language of the U N O —procedural difficulties The Dewan had decided that the Court should be held from 3 p m to 5 p m With the greatest difficulty I induced him to change the time from 8 to 11 a m

" 'Would you mind Mr Munshi, if, while hearing your arguments, I glanced through the columns of the *Times of India*?' asked the Dewan 'I do not like the idea of being late with the current news' I said I had no objection

"The other difficulty was about our dress We were expected to be garbed in the formal dress of the State with a saffron safa (turban) tied over our heads However, the rule was relaxed on our paying a fee of Rs 3/- each Shelat was miserable He had never seen me in a saffron safa and as a loyal junior, he wanted to have the luxury of his senior adorned with a flaming headgear

"The Court had been set up in a small anteroom of His Highness's Palace But in order to invest it with judicial dignity, the huge gold-plated sofas and chairs and velvet curtains had been removed Furniture of a kind generally found in cheap restaurants in a small town, had been moved into the court room Forensic dignity had been provided

by the spreading of a red cloth over our shaky table

' Our opponent was a lawyer from Indore who had been specially engaged He took Shelat into his confidence the fees he would be earning in this case were to be adjusted against the debt owing to the State by his father

"Dressed in gown and bands and a Gandhi cap, I made my bow to the Court Of the three Judges who formed the Bench, the Dewan busied himself now and then with the *Times of India* which he out of courtesy held below the table Throughout the trial the Revenue Minister contributed an unfading, pleasant smile, he was a cheerful spectator, out to enjoy whatever happened

"The Home Minister, however, to whom a wicked rumour—I am sure, untrue—had attributed the final shape of the lower court's judgment, knew the case inside out In the beginning he did his best to lose patience, but I soon succeeded in injecting some into him

"The Dewan was an outsider Forced as he had been in the State by the Resident, his presence in Ratlam had been deeply resented by the party led by the Defence Minister, and I could see that any hit at the prosecution provoked an ill-concealed chuckle on his part Once when I characterized the prosecution as 'baseless and a waste of public time and money', the Dewan with evident disgust, turned to the Home Minister and whispered, loudly enough for us to hear, 'Saksena, that is one for you'. I was not slow to utilise these revelations

"At the end of the first day's hearing, the local lawyers who had been permitted to listen to my ar-

guments, introduced themselves to me and I invited all of them to tea next evening

"From the Court I straightway drove to the *pedhi* of my Marwari client The whole bazar had collected on the roadside to see me step out of the car, The *munim*, who had been informed of my intended visit, was profuse in his apologies for not having received him before He had cups of hot milk waiting for us

"When we returned to Shivji's Hotel, we found that there was no chance of our being able to hold consultations in privacy So we, the lawyers, went for a long, long walk, holding consultation in the manner of the peripatetic philosophers of Greece

"The next day we met the accused in the jail, a disgusting and vermin-infested place They sat huddled together, for they were shivering with cold that winter morning

"The atmosphere in the Court remained the same the Dewan now and then reading *The Times of India* which he held on his lap below the table, the Home Minister hostile, the Revenue Minister all smiles

"The same evening I gave tea to the local lawyers, who were happy that the ring-fence had been destroyed

"As I proceeded with my argument, I referred to the evidence which went to show that the accused were preparing for the violent overthrow of His Highness's Government

" 'What were the weapons?', I asked

" 'Rifles', returned the advocate of the State

"I asked for an inspection of them, but the Home Minister refused to give them

"The next day, as I had become suspicious, I made a formal application for the inspection of the rifles I used rather strong language, of which I am sometimes fond, and the Dewan granted the application The Home Minister also acquiesced in thinking that the Dewan might be prejudiced if the inspection was withheld The Home Minister rose from his chair, caused the bundle of exhibits to be opened and pointed out the weapons

"I walked over to the bundle, picked up one of the guns, held it up for the inspection of the Court and said 'My Lords, you will see that this is a toy-gun of Japanese make and available in the market for a rupee or two The prosecution has evidently proceeded on the footing that the Court does not know what a 'rifle' means

"The Dewan glanced maliciously at the Home Minister, and 'not all the king's horses nor all the king's men' could stop the crowded Court from bursting into laughter

"Encouraged by this discovery I asked for the target and ammunition exhibited in the case The Home Minister walked up to the bundle of exhibits again and I followed suit When the bundle was opened, it was seen to contain a heap of burnt match-sticks and a cheap calendar which showed the map of India with the town of Ratlam marked in red And not a mark on the target to show that any match-stick had touched it!

"The situation was becoming comic opera

"The only evidence against another accused who had been sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment, was that he had drawn the portrait of the first accused The criticism of the evidence on

which this man had been convicted furnished another occasion for a burst of uproarious laughter, which not even the frown of the Home Minister could control.

"Within two or three days the atmosphere in Ratlam had changed The lawyers gave me a return party, to which they invited the judges of the Court and several members of the public The *munim* of my Marwari client also summoned up the courage to give a party and as our car proceeded through the town, it was obliged to stop now and then so that we could be offered *atar*

"On about the fourth day, the Gujarati residents gave us a dinner Just as we were sitting down to it, someone ran in crying 'Shivjibhai has come Shivjibhai has come He wants to see Mr Munshi' A shiver ran down the spine of most of the people present, the Defence Minister had come to arrest me I told one of my hosts to invite Shivji inside so that he might join us at the dinner The reply that came back was that as he was not properly dressed, he would like to meet me outside

"Accompanied by Moolji Sheth I went out of the dining hall to find a big motor car standing in front of the gate near it stood its owner in a *kurta* and a jacket of green velvet. Moolji Sheth whispered in my ear, 'Shivjibhai'. Though I did not like this visitation, I assumed as cheerful an air as I could and walked up to him 'Hallo, Shivjibhai,' I said 'I have been trying to meet you all these days, but never could'

"Shivji replied in Gujarati: 'Munshiji, I was out on tour I am very sorry that I could not meet you before'

"We walked a few paces away by ourselves Moolji Sheth stood at a distance, a picture of unhappiness Shivji looked every inch what he was reputed to be an ill-educated and egregiously self-important palace favourite But, for the moment, he appeared deflated

'Munshiji, please accept my apologies His Highness has taken me to task for not being hospitable to a distinguished man like you He says that I have ruined the prestige of Ratlam by my bad manners You must, therefore, come to tea with me tomorrow '

"The next day after Court rose, Shivji's car took me to his richly furnished house His welcome, a curious blend of Gujarati warmth and Malvi ceremoniousness, was effusive Three of us, the host, his *charan* (bard) and myself, all three Gujaratis, sat down in front of tables heavily laden with tea and coffee pots, sweets and fruits Shivji and the bard were the fans of my historical romances, and they were ecstatic in praise of my heroes and heroines I had to do my best to look as if I was lapping up their compliments greedily

"The bard then recited a few heroic poems As we proceeded with our tea, Shivji pressed me to eat one of the *kachauris* which lay on the table in heaps For years I had not taken the smallest morsel of food between lunch and dinner I explained to my host how my health would suffer if I broke the rule But Shivji would not accept a "no" He had the best cook in Rajasthan, a world specialist in the making of *kachauris*, and these he had had specially made for me

"I thought of the men rotting in that vermin-infested jail and decided to eat a *kachauri* For once,

Shivji was right It was the finest of its kind But it was flavoured with green chillies and pepper, and I knew that for three days to come my system would be in flames But duty was duty 'Better to die doing one's duty', Shri Krishna has said, and the lawyer's duty was to save his clients—even by setting fire to his system

"When the bard left us, Shivjibhai's attitude suddenly changed He was meek, humble and flattering 'Munshiji, the whole of my life and reputation is in youi hands', he said in an appealing voice. 'We started this prosecution because the Resident wanted it I did my best But now His Highness is very angry with me The Resident also thinks that I have bungled things and he too is angry with me People say that I am their enemy Gandhiji thinks that I am a wicked man Look at this world · I wanted to oblige everybody, but I am now the scapegoat of everyone Please save me My life is in your hands ' On and on he went in this exaggerated fashion

" 'Look here, Shivjibhai', I replied, 'I have not come here to harm anyone I only want justice to be done to my clients If you leave it to me, I shall see that your reputation does not suffer On the contrary, the reputation of the Privy Council of Ratlam will be enhanced and so will the reputation of His Highness '

"He replied 'Please find a solution ' I said, I would 'Will you come to His Highness at midnight? We do not want the Dewan to know anything of this '

" 'Certainly', I said

" 'I will be at the hotel at 11-45 to-night', promised Shivji

"We parted as friends, and he saw me off with effusive compliments

"At 11-45 Shivji came to the hotel, with his big motor car close-curtained as for the use of *pardanashin* ladies. We drove to the palace, which we entered by a backdoor, and, after climbing up a servants' staircase we found ourselves in the presence of His Highness, who was awaiting me

"He greeted me warmly Then for about twenty minutes he abused Shivji to both his heart's content and mine 'Shivji is a wicked man', he said 'He has put me into this difficulty I have always been a good ruler and looked upon my people as my children But Shivji has ruined me by mismanaging this case Now the Governor-General is making enquiries into the proceedings Gandhiji has sent you here My good name is in the mud'

"I did my best to soothe his feelings I told him that I was in Ratlam to save the accused, but at the same time, I was anxious to save His Highness's reputation

" 'If you ask me', I said, 'I will give you my frank opinion about the merits of the case There is no evidence against accused numbers. They should be acquitted The conviction of the rest deserves to be confirmed, but the sentences on accused numbers.. are absurdly heavy They should be reduced substantially As regards the rest of the accused, in no event could their sentences be more than three years, in view of the precedent of the Meerut Conspiracy Case If this is done it would establish that the prosecution was justified and your Court independent'

"I do not know whether it was proper for me

as counsel for the accused to give my honest opinion about the merits of the case But if I had to help them at all, that was the only way

"Then I added 'If Your Highness is anxious to take a parental view of your subjects, the sentences of those who have been convicted for less than three years could be remitted on the birthday of Your Highness's daughter, which falls about a fortnight hence After a further two months Your Highness's own birthday is going to be celebrated This is a great occasion on which Your Highness, if you should be so pleased, may exercise the prerogative of mercy The sentences of the rest can then be remitted This will bring universal satisfaction The professional agitator who has advocated some kind of sabotage is an outsider If Your Highness is dissatisfied with him after his sentence is remitted, he can be externed from the State '

"His Highness was delighted While bidding me good-bye he turned to Shivji, saying 'Everything Munshiji has said must be carried out'

"Shivji folded his hands, bowed low and said '*Hukum*'

"As soon as I got up the next morning I told Shelat to gather all the papers and fling them away

"We went to the Court and I resumed my address But a miracle had taken place A magic change had come over the Home Minister. He was all smiles No sooner did I make a point than he saw it and not only saw it but saw it clearly · 'Yes, Mr Munshi, perfectly right, I see your point,' he would say and add, 'page so-and-so of the records supports you and so does Exhibit so-and-so '

"With visibility thus improved, the Home Mini-

ster not only saw point after point but also saw new ones as well The Dewan was the only person who felt dazed

"The weather and the wind both having turned favourable, my case sailed briskly along with the Home Minister now as my pilot By the evening we had demolished between us the best part of the prosecution case

"The change had been so sudden and unexpected that when, next day, the lawyer for the State rose to reply, he did not know where he stood The Home Minister pounced upon him, criticised the prosecution in no uncertain terms and tore the judgment of the Lower Court to shreds Within two hours the Government Advocate had nothing left to say His case had been smashed by the Home Minister, or rather, by the *'kachauri'*

"The sudden collapse of the prosecution case had a sensational effect on the town Many important citizens turned out to meet me and we had quite a crowd to give us a send-off at the Ratlam station when we left for Bombay

"Thus ended the *'kachauri'* case

"The judgement was delivered shortly after My formula, with appropriate changes, was enshrined in the order of the Court In about three months' time all the accused were free When Kanaiyalal reported to Gandhiji on the *kachauri* case, he wrote me an exceedingly nice letter

"The professional etiquette in England affords a lady-lawyer to shed tears—of course, professional —to secure a verdict for her client Why should I not eat a *kachauri* to secure the same result?"

9

THE LAKSHMIKANTAM MURDER CASE

In an active professional career of about forty years, Munshi has ranged over a vast variety of cases, grave and gay, covering practically every branch of the law But the Lakshmikantam Murder Case was certainly one of his high water-mark performances No other case conducted by him was so difficult and so sensational, nor were the victim and the accused so colourful Throughout the rich and varied legal annals of South India there has rarely been a case which created such a stir or engrossed such widespread interest as did this Without any exaggeration it may be called the *cause celebre* of the century Let Munshi recount in his characteristic way this sensational case —

> "By 1944, Lakshmikantam was a legendary figure in the South He was the Prince of yellow journalism, a scoundrel on a grand scale with superhuman skill and unrivalled effrontery
>
> "His lurid career began many years before he met an untimely end In the thirties, he used a forged document, knowing it to be forged, and, for the offence, was placed for trial before the High Court of Madras During the trial, he escaped from custody, was re-arrested and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment
>
> "While being transferred from the Madras Penitentiary to the Rajamahendry Central Jail, he drugged his guards, escaped from custody and fled to a distant village There he changed his name, settled down and married a girl of the new caste which he claimed to belong to Later, betrayed by his birth-

marks, he was re-arrested, charged for escaping custody and stenced to serve the terms of both his sentences Naturally, he came to be credited with miraculous powers

"Shortly after he had served his term of imprisonment, Lakshmikantam took to 'yellow' journalism Those were the days of strict control of newsprint and newspapers But nothing was impossible to the adventurer He went to Delhi, secured some influential support and got a licence to publish a Tamil weekly, called *Cinema Thoothu*

"The journal specialised in spicy stories about the well-known figures of the cinema world, as also about well-placed persons in Madras, who suddenly found their names besmirched week after week With difficulty some of them got his licence cancelled. Lakshmikantam, however, could not be outwitted easily He bought out the interests of the owner of another Tamil weekly, *Hindu Nesan* and emerged as a veritable terror

"In the course of the trial I had many an occasion to read, both in court and outside, issue after issue of the *Hindu Nesan*. Not a single well-known or respected name in Madras escaped Lakshmikantam's attention, though the leading men and women in the film world were his favourite targets In a trenchant and vitriolic style, he exposed, derided, and chastised his victims in a manner which Junius and Jonathan Swift might well have envied

"It was the boom time of the cinema industry Rivers of black money flowed in swift floods Photogenic faces, melodious voices and luscious curves sprang overnight into fame and fabulous wealth The drinking parties, promiscuous intimacies and wild

orgies of men and women suddenly lifted from obscurity into the mysterious star world, scandalised and disgusted the man in the street, yet kept him in awe-struck admiration Into the hearts of this lusty crowd, Lakshmikantam, wicked though he was, put the fear of God

"The height to which Lakshmikantam carried the art, which he developed with devilish cunning has had no parallel before or since To the general masses of Tamil reading men and women, however, he was the wrathful prophet of righteousness, the guardian angel of the chastity of Indian womanhood, privileged to pry into the private life of all, the masses who are never happier than when they see the heads of those whom they admire or envy lie rolling in mud, felt the thrill of a holy crusade

"Lakshmikantam's method of approach was perfect He maintained spies of his own, who stalked the victims he had marked out with great skill. He collected his materials from them with care and, on facts, reared a superstructure of slanderous but plausible insinuations which made the *Hindu Nesan* fascinating as well as devastating

"Lakshmikantam had the principles of a bold bad man. He refused to be frightened He would not be bought at any price, though it was said that some rich parties systematically financed him But Lakshmikantam never lacked money The episodes in the lives of the film-stars, the great and the rich made salacious gave *Hindu Nesan* a wide circulation wherever Tamil was read Its copies were sometimes sold at fantastic prices

"The high, the mighty and the rich squirmed under his lashes They looked forward to every issue

of the *Hindu Nesan* with trembling hearts and they knew not how to seek deliverance Again and again, the Press, where the *Hindu Nesan* was printed, was smashed by unknown ruffians in the middle of the night. But Lakshmikantam was more than a match for them He saw to it that his paper, sometimes printed in unknown presses, appeared with unbroken regularity

"On the morning of November 8, 1944, Lakshmikantam was returning in a *rikshaw* from the residence of his advocate, when he was waylaid and stabbed on General Collins Road, Vepery, Madras He was taken to the General Hospital, an operation was performed on him But he died soon after

"Lakshmikantam's murder created a tremendous sensation in the Province Many of his victims breathed a sigh of relief However, a large concourse, reported to be over fifty thousand, attended the funeral of this self-constituted defender of the honour of Indian womenhood He was given honours which, in India, have been reserved only for great national leaders

"The police found it difficult to trace the culprits There was a public outcry that the highly placed miscreants, who had abetted Lakshmikantam's murder, were allowed to escape justice The Madras police was therefore on their trial

"Public interest in Lakshmikantam's murder reached its peak when the Criminal Investigation Department charge-sheeted, among others, three of the most prominent figures in the film world of the South. The first was M K Thiagaraja Bhagavathar, then the darling of the cinema-going public of South India. No Tamilian felt happy till he had heard his melo-

dious voice A sort of glamour surrounded him, he was reported to lead a gay life Rumour had it that he never charged less than a six-figure sum for every film in which he acted

"The second accused was N S Krishnan, who along with his wife and partner, T A Mathuram, constituted the best team of comedians in the South Perhaps he was the best loved of the cinema stars

"I went and saw one film in which they both had acted They certainly lacked the finesse of Charlie Chaplin, but for sheer uproarious fun I have not come across two such comedians in any film produced in India or elsewhere

"I had occasion also to meet him several times in the lock-up in order to take instructions in the case Even under the Damocles's sword, which then hung over him, he would cheerfully mimic Justice Mockett, next moment, myself, the third, my learned opponent the Advocate-General all with such inimitable grotesqueness as to throw me into irrepressible laughter Never for a moment had I thought that I was so ludicrous a figure in a court of law

"The third accused was S M Sriramulu Naidu, a well-known producer and film director He came from one of the richest and influential families of Coimbatore I saw him at Coimbatore some years later He was—and I understand still is—carrying on quite a flourishing business

"These three, along with five others, one a butcher and another a cowherd, were charged with the offence of conspiracy to murder Lakshmikantam It was in pursuance of this conspiracy, it was alleged, that Lakshmikantam was stabbed by Vadivelu, one of the accused, on 8th November, 1944 Public

opinion, however, is never happy with the obvious. It placed the guilt on some highly placed and influential persons The police, it was said, had framed up the charge against the cinema people only because they were not influential.

"The proceedings before the committing magistrate had attracted the widest attention Every newspaper, including the highly staid and sober *Hindu* reported the proceedings in full When all the accused were committed to the Sessions, public interest was at its highest.

"R Narayana Aiyangar, a leading figure in the cinema world of Madras, came to Bombay to engage me They had engaged Mr Nugent Grant, a leading criminal lawyer in Madras, to defend S. M Sriramulu Naidu, but he had died and the choice had fallen on me

"Narayana Aiyangar was a very hospitable and charming man, and for the month that I stayed with him, he made me comfortable in his house The only drawback was that in a few days my English accents began to be Tamilised, unconsciously, I began to accent the last syllabel of every English word It was then that I acquired my little vocabulary of Tamil words It extended to accosting Narayana Aiyangar's little grand-daughter by the word *Eppadi Yirukkan* (How are you?), and I taught her its Gujarati equivalent 'Kem Chho?' The only other Tamil word I picked up was *'uppu'* for salt I never had the gift of learning languages.

"The accused were represented by twentysix counsel in all But Narayana had a hold over all the three important accused and at his instance it was decided that though I appeared only for Naidu, I

was to lead the other counsel on the general aspect of the case The lawyers for the other accused had to supplement my efforts only if anything concerning a particular accused had been left out This led to considerable heart-burning among some of them They did not take kindly to the arrangement that I—and that too from another High Court—should conduct not only my client's case, but also to lead them generally

"Justice Mockett, who presided over the Sessions' was a small man, buried in a huge wig and gown From his general attitude what I could gather was that, according to him, the prosecution like the King of England, could do no wrong He had a family likeness, to a Judge of the Bombay High Court, who, when the defence counsel made his case unanswerable, asked 'Mr so-and-so, if you say your client was innocent, why did the Prosecution bring the case against him?'

"Once when I was cross-examining a witness, Justice Mockett asked me, 'Mr Munshi, do you mean to suggest that the witness is telling a lie?' With a polite bow, I replied 'My Lord, I do not *suggest* anything of the kind. I propose to establish that he is telling a lie' But he was patient and courteous throughout, though, whenever he intervened, he leaned, as consistently as a Judge could against the defence

"The prosecution was conducted by Sri P V. Rajamannar, Advocate-General, now the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court He was assisted by Sri P Govinda Menon, then the Crown Prosecutor, now a Judge of the Supreme Court and three other juniors The C I D were on their mattle and

left no stone unturned to secure a conviction I had little doubt that on my side too there were forces which were moving heaven and earth to see that the accused were acquitted

"At this distance of time, it is impossible to recapture the absorbing interest which this case, which lasted for twenty two hearings, evoked The Court was crowded to capacity The *Hindu,* the *Indian Express,* the *Mail,* and the Tamil and Telugu papers published verbatim reports of the proceedings and with meticulous reporting, for which Madras is justly famous I could almost sense my accent or emphasis in the way my question were published.

"As I went in Narayana Aiyangar's car to and from the Court, I could see small groups of men gathered on the way, one among them reading loudly from the latest newspaper, others listening with rapt attention, and some of them seeing me pass in the car, pointed to me as to the star performer Every point in my cross-examination was noted, elaborated and many were the kind friends who came to me to help me with suggestions to improve the manner in which I was conducting the case

"For days together I was busy cross-examining one prosecution witness after another The spirit of Lakshmikantam dominated the whole atmosphere. Most of the witnesses could not tell a straightforward story nor the whole truth There was some thing mysterious about the evidence of the Advocate whom the deceased had visited a few minutes before his death The medical evidence was anything but satisfactory All this gave me the opportunity of dealing with the witnesses somewhat mercilessly

"In the course of the examination of the medical

witnesses it came out that while the operation on Lakshmikantam was being performed after he had been stabbed, the surgeon's knife had penetrated one of his kidneys One of the witnesses lapsed into momentary inattention and admitted this I immediately pursued the point so that by the end of the day both the witnesses and the Judge realised to their horror that I was very near proving that it was the surgeon's knife that was the approximate cause of the death of Lakshmikantam

"I learnt that the medical experts got together that night and decided that, in the light of the evidence —which was being published verbatim in the papers —new light had to be thrown on this aspect of the case

"The learned Judge proved indulgent The new evidence improved the situation Anyhow, a serious doubt had been raised as to whether the wound inflicted by the murderer had necessarily been the cause of Lashmikantam's death For the next day and a half, the atmosphere was electric Incidentally, by the time the case was finished I had learnt all about the kidneys, where they are located and the diverse ways in which an injury to them can kill a man

"The case for the prosecution against my client, Naidu, was that he had entered into a conspiracy with the Bhagavathar and Arya Veera Senan to do away with Lakshmikantam This conspiracy, it was alleged, was hatched at the Woodlands Hotel at Madras where Bhagavathar was living at the time

"The mainstay of the prosecution in this part of the case against Naidu, was one Kamalanathan, who was related to Lakshmikantam The prosecution case

was that Vadivelu, one of the accused, had attacked Lakshmikantam with a knife on the 19th October, even before the fatal atack on the 8th November. Referring to this incident, Kamalanathan had deposed in the Magistrate's court that he had been to the Woodlands Hotel three days after the incident of the 19th October, and there had found Naidu and Bhagavathar talking to Arya Veera Senan about killing Lakshmikantam.

"I was instructed that if, under pressure of cross-examination, I could extract from Kamalanathan the admission that he had started from home just after 4-30 p m, (because the inauspicious period of *Rahukalam* had expired that day just after the stroke of 4-30), there was some chance of Naidu's acquittal If *Rahukalam* had expired exactly at 4-30 p m, the day of the visit, according to the calendar, would have been the 26th October, and not the 22nd, as deposed to by the witness And if the day of his visit had been the 26th of October, it could be proved beyond doubt that on that day Naidu was at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay

"*Rahukalam*, a span of an hour-and-half, occurs at varying but according to the calendar at ascertainable times, on different days of the week and is generally avoided by orthodox persons in the South for any auspicious task

"For the first time in my experience, the life of a human being was hanging on my skill as a questioner I felt nervous If Kamalanathan were to get an inkling of what I was driving at, he had only to say that he was not sure whether he had left home exactly at 4-30 p m, and that it might have been a

little before, or a little after, to prevent me from making my alibi cast iron.

"By the time I had arrived at this part of my cross-examination, I had established friendly relations with Kamalanathan by creating in him the impression that he was making it difficult for me to shake him.

Then our colloquy proceeded somewhat on these lines:

'Are you sure you left your home just after half past four?'

'Yes, I am sure,' he replied

'You might have made a mistake'

'Certainly not It had just struck half past four when I left home'

'How can you remember that? Were you waiting for half past four to strike'

'Of course I was' By this time the witness was confident of being able to deal with the insistent lawyer

'And are you sure you reached the Woodlands Hotel at 5 p m?'

'Yes, I am sure'

'There might have been a mistake Was your attention drawn to something which makes you feel so definite about having reached the Hotel at 5 p.m, or are you just guessing?'

'Oh, yes' The witness, as is usual in such cases, was improvising incontrovertible proof 'There was a big clock in the front room of the Hotel, and I remember to have looked at it It showed exactly 5 p m'

'I am going to give you another chance Do you swear and say that you left home at 4-30 p m and not a minute before?'

'Yes, I swear it It was just after half past four'

'And that you were waiting for half past four to strike?'

"At this point my heart began to throb, for the life of Naidu hung on the questions I was about to ask

"Summoning my courage I asked 'You are quite sure that Lakshmikantam was stabbed on the 19th of October?'

" 'Yes'

" 'And that you went to see Naidu at the Woodlands Hotel three days after that?'

" 'Yes, certain'

"Assuming an air of innocence I let go the crucial suggestion

" 'You have said you were waiting for half past four to strike For what reason? Was it inauspicious to start before 4-30 that you remember the fact so particularly?'

Kamalanathan sprang to the bait

" 'Certainly It would have been an inauspicious moment to start before half past four'

" 'Why do you say it was inauspicious? Was it because of Rahukalam, or of something which I am told is observed by people here?' I spoke as though I did not understand what Rahukalam meant

" 'Oh, yes It was Rahukalam,' he replied

" 'On that day Rahukalam ended just before 4-30 p m You are quite sure?'

" 'Yes, I am positive'

" 'You swear and say that Rahukalam ended just before 4-30 p m.

" 'Oh, yes I swear,' Kamalanathan asserted

" 'Look at this calendar Rahukalam only ended just before 4-30 p m on the 26th of October '

" 'Kamalanathan looked at the calendar and saw that he had committed a gross mistake He began to fumble

"I adopted a severe tone 'Come, come If Rahukalam had ended at 4-30, the day would have been the 26th of October, and not the 22nd Is that not so?"

" 'Yes '

" 'Would you be surprised to know that Naidu was at the Taj Mahal Hotel at Bombay on the 26th of October?'

"Kamalanathan had no answer

"The collapse of Kamalanathan was the last straw that broke the back of the prosecution case for the approver had, much to the disappointment of the prosecution, refused to implicate Naidu, I don't remember whether he was treated as a hostile witness

"Later I led evidence to show that Naidu was at the Taj Mahal Hotel at Bombay on the 26th of October The manager of the Hotel corroborated this fact from his records

"The Advocate-General in fairness entered a plea of *nolle prosequi* so far as Sriramulu Naidu was concerned

"Naidu's acquittal created a sensation all over Madras I suddenly became a miracle-worker and, not to spoil the effect, I decided to leave for Bombay next morning Meanwhile the other accused felt that my absence from the trial might react to their disadvantage so that I was immediately engaged for N S Krishnan

"On behalf of this accused I tendered elaborate

evidence to show that he had been at Salem on the 7th of November, and that he had received a registered letter while there A signed receipt bearing that date was tendered in evidence

"I addressed the jury for several hours As I proceeded I could feel that the majority of the jury was coming round When at last it retired it was expected that Krishnan at any rate would be acquitted

"In his address to the jury, the learned Judge leant heavily against the defence He had ruled out most of the points of law against us; he brushed aside the doubts we had raised He had some caustic comments to make on the alibi which we had tried to prove on behalf of Krishnan

"Krishnan, as I have mentioned, was a very popular figure in Madras and the general opinion was that he would be acquitted Police officers came to me to make arrangements for spiriting him out of the court, for a crowd of 25,000 had gathered on the High Court grounds to garland and carry him in procession

"We never thought that an adverse verdict could be brought in, let alone by a majority vote of the jurors. A last minute change occurred The verdict of guilty, if I remember rightly, was six to three against all the accused In all my professional life I had never been taken aback by a verdict so unexpected

"The Judge was ready with the sentence It had been a wicked conspiracy into which all the accused had been guilty of entering, and as the result of which Lakshmikantam had been murdered But in view of the lurid past of Lakshmikantam, the Judge sentenced the accused to transportation for life

"There were many speculations as to why the jury had come to so unexpected a decision. But this is usual when the unexpected happens.

"After the expectation of an acquittal, the shock was too great for every one of us. When the news reached the crowd it howled with rage and the police dispersed it with some difficulty. When Narayan Aiyar and I went to his house, the servant who was expecting to receive a free Krishnan rushed forward with a pumpkin, a coconut and lights, to welcome him. We brushed him aside.

"The next question was, how to break the news to Mathuram. Narayana Aiyar and myself therefore went to Krishnan's house. Mathuram was expecting her husband's arrival at any moment, but when she saw us, she read the fateful news in our faces and collapsed. I have seen many women broken by grief, but I have never seen a woman so heart-broken, or crying so tragically. We sat there for about half-an-hour and I felt that she might die of grief at any moment.

"An appeal was preferred to the Appellate Bench of the High Court which held that it was only if the verdict of the jury appeared to be perverse that the Appellate Court could interfere; as they did not find the verdict to be perverse, they confirmed the conviction and the sentence. Bhagavathar and Krishnan appealed to the Privy Council which held that evidence could be examined afresh by the Appellate Court. The appeal was therefore re-heard by the Division Bench of the Madras High Court so far as Bhagavathar and Krishnan were concerned. The accused were given the benefit of the doubt and acquitted.

> "My friend Dr P Subbaroyan was then the Home Minister of Madras I sought his intervention The two rich men who had appealed to the Privy Council had been acquitted What crime, I argued, had the poor co-accused committed that they should rot in jail for fourteen years
>
> "I have some recollection that their sentences were later remitted by the Government of Madras"

10

SUMMING UP

Commenting on Munshi's performance in the Lakshmikantam case, an eminent advocate of the Madras High Court remarked "Since the days of the great Norton, we have not heard such cross-examination" Chief Justice P V Rajamannar, who led the prosecution, recalled about this case in 1946

> "I had the pleasure and privilege of being thrown together with Munshiji though we were on opposite sides in the sensational Lakshmikantam murder case which went on in the High Court for over a month last year (1945) I have the pleasantest recollections of those days and I have with me as a memento the photograph taken at the garden party given to Munshiji by the Gujarati Association in which we are found seated side by side What impressed me most in his handling of the defence in that case was his remarkable thoroughness of preparation and mastery of detail I do not believe he left anything to the juniors, though they never stinted any labour

Being myself a devotee of literature and a dabbler in playwriting, I could see and appreciate very often the sweep of imagination and his intimate knowledge of human nature in his cross-examination of the prosecution witnesses He was always kind and generous to me Our relations were very cordial and not once in the several trying days did a hot word pass between us Munshiji does not belong to a class of lawyers whose world is made of statistics, law reports and case papers He has varied interests and his achievement in many spheres of cultural activity are remarkable ''

Well might Chief Justice Rajamannar lay emphasis on the very cordial relations he had with Munshi for the latter's relations with his colleagues at the Bar, as well as with the Judges, have always been marked by cordiality and sincerity He is one of the few seniors who has been popular both amongst the seniors and among the juniors Among solicitors he could count quite a few as his life-long friends Many of the present judges have been his personal friends In the Court, while conducting a case he hardly ever lost his temper with the opponent or the presiding Judge

Of Munshi as an Advocate, K A Somjee, an ex-Judge of the Bombay High Court and a Senior Member of the Bombay Bar, wrote in 1946 as follows —

''The more difficult the case, the more subtle the point, in greater prominence is brought out the great advocacy of Munshiji Munshiji always sails with wind Whether he is sailing a large ship or a frail bark, even on the stormy sea of the temper and limited understanding of a Judge, Munshiji sails with the wind He may realise fully that he is being taken away from his point but that does not ruffle him He will take a large detour, keep the wind in his sail

and in a subtle and clever manner will reach the calm of the harbour and lo and behold, more often than not the Judge will be with him at the harbour

"Munshiji is an asset to a clever Judge He is a great help to any Judge He facilitates the work of the Judge by lucidly expounding difficult and subtle propositions of law

"Munshiji is a pillar of strength to his client In a weak case, Munshiji knows exactly how far to go and when the right moment arrives Munshiji will bring about a settlement which perhaps nobody would have thought possible

"A word about Munshiji's junior, whoever he may be In any case, if the junior is worth his salt and if he, even in the midst of Munshiji's argument were to draw the attention of Munshiji to any particular point, Munshiji with his great grasp will at once pick it up without the least hesitation and make good use of it It is very few seniors only who can do that without being perturbed, Munshiji is one of them

"One of the great points in Munshiji as a lawyer is that he always makes allowances for human frailties"

Somjee's description of how Munshi used to take the Judge with him is perfectly true He liked by mild pressure to take the Judge through the various stages of his arguments in the manner that he thought the Judge should go through If the Judge differed and went out of the four walls of his arguments, he travelled with the Judge for the time being and by sheer dint of perseverance he again brought him back to the charmed circle chalked out by him

The chief factor which attracted the Judge towards him was Munshi's tremendous grasp and thoroughness of

preparation, which gave scope to the Judge to dispose of the matter quickly and expeditiously The fundamental principles of law are so deeply ingrained in Munshi that a mere propounding of an untenable principle was enough to make him feel that something incorrect was being said or proposed He needed no statutes and no precedents to have this kind of feeling Knowldge of fundamentals has become a matter of common sense to him The Judge trying his case could safely depend on him for a correct exposition of law

This did not mean that a judge or an opponent could afford to remain without vigilance Munshi has always been a dangerous opponent His advocacy nearly always contained some element of surprise, something incalculable Behind the opening of a case or propounding of an ordinary proposition of law there ran a mercurial process of thought seeking new ways, new methods and penetrating the opponent's case to find out fatal gaps and loopholes

Even out of the most prosaic advocacy there peeped out the artist in him The imagination of the artist supplied materials that were found wanting in the fabric that was built in the brief It was because of that trait in him that Munshi put up before the judge and the jury an alternative case stating to them that his opponent's case was not the exact version of facts that happened but that the real was what he had constructed in his mind and was the only one that he narrated That was where the novelist and the dramatist in him dominated the mere advocate This was the reason why in the cases that he handled there came up so often the dramatic element which made his performance all the more fascinating

Conferences with him were not dull affairs He was happy and frankly complimentary when facts were placed before him in a logical, and preferably in his favourite

method of chronological, order Very often by a slight twist or turn of a fact here and there a new complexion was given to the whole case, which no one had dreamt of before. No judge complained of a lack of interest when Munshi conducted a case before him Once interested in a case or a law point contained in it, even his junior was astonished at the industry he devoted to it

In summing up the legal facet of Munshi's variegated career it is impossible to improve upon the glowing tribute of Chief Justice Chagla who wrote about Munshi in 1946 for the Diamond Jubilee Commemoration Volume Throwing as it does considerable light on Munshi's methods of advocacy and his relations with the Bar and Bench alike no apology is needed for quoting it in full

From 1930 long sojourns in jails or public work, and spells of office have compelled Munshi to suspend his practice at the Bar for long periods But these absence have never effected the flow of work coming to his chambers when he returned to the Bar

The last case he argued was in March 1950 before the Supreme Court Since then he has not appeared in any case, but who can deny that the loss to the Bar has been a gain to the country!

> "I have known Munshi, and known him well, for nearly 25 years I vividly remember entering the Bar common room as a freshly enrolled Barrister. All the giants of the Bar were there—Inverarity, Strangman, Jinnah, Kanga, Bhulabhai, Tarapore-walla, Coltman To my young and terrified eyes this seemed to be a ring of steel impossible to penetrate But I could see that there was a second line of young and energetic aspirants who had already made some inroads upon this citadel Among these, Munshi was one of the most prominent

"It did not take me long to get on friendly terms with Munshi We had many things in common We did not think, as most of our seniors did, that Law was the *ultima ratio* of our existence It was fascinating profession, a great training and discipline for the mind, if you succeeded, the prizes were great and glittering But it could be a terrible thing to spend all your life in reading your briefs and expounding the law to the rather lonely and pathetic figure on the Bench By the way, we had been nurtured on the sturdy traditions of the Bar, and had a healthy contempt for the Bench We had only one life to lead, and there were far more interesting things to do—Politics, Literature, Art

"The first thing that impressed me about Munshi was his versatility He was interested in so many things And his interest was that of an artist He had the insatiable curiosity—which is the beginning of Art He had the instinct which could see the hidden meaning behind superficial phenomena—which is the artistic temperament And he had the gift of expression—which is the capacity of the artist to express himself

"As years went by, he and I appeared in many cases together, and were opposed to each other in several others It was always a pleasure and an intellectual treat to have him as a Leader I remember that he always used to ask me to come for a conference in all important cases to his house in the morning After the conference I used to have breakfast with him, and then go to Court together I used always to wonder at the very small quantity of food he consumed, and I always joked with him that he must be

finding sustenance from some celestial manna which he concealed from us

"Conference with Munshi was never a slovenly, hurried affair It was a solemn, full-dressed debate We tried to find the principles underlying the mass of ill-digested facts which were packed in our briefs Munshi would have a sheet of foolscap before him with a fountain pen in his hand and would jot down the various propositions under which the different facts should be grouped He would only feel happy when he discovered the silver thread that showed us the way out of the labyrinth of our case And then he would stand before the Judge in Court stating the propositions *seriatim*, looking at him and the other side with a query in his eyes—How can there be any answer to these propositions? Of course, there was always a danger of over-simplification Unfortunately, neither facts nor law can be reduced to simple and lucid propositions But this was an infinitely better method than the chaotic opening of a case in which you never see the wood for the trees

"Munshi has always liked to work on a large canvas He likes to present his case in the grand manner The artist in him gives to every case the complexion of a breathless drama He gives you the idea that the eternal verities are on the side of his client and that in deciding the case in which he is engaged you are making legal history Therefore, it follows that Munshi is never very happy in the rough and tumble of a lawyer's work As was said of a senior member of the Bar, and a very dear friend of mine, he cannot make small points with large gestures He makes important points with a considerable economy of gestures

'Munshi has a subtle and ingenious mind The literary and the legal mind are two entirely different things They are rarely combined in one person Success in one field is usually a disqualification for the other It is the greatest of Munshi's triumphs that he has made a great name for himself both as a lawyer and as a literary artist But I think his first abiding love is for the Muses He has given to Law and Politics much of his time, energy and enthusiasm which the gods had intended he should give for the service of literature But therein, I think, lies Munshi's great charm He could have been a dry uninteresting lawyer or a cold and calculating politician He is neither the one nor the other The artist in him is always peeping from behind the lawyer and the politician And, therefore, both in his advocacy and in his politics there is the element of the incalculable I will not speak of his politics But at the Bar he has often startled both his opponent and the Judge by urging a point which has struck no one, and yet which has often proved decisive of the case

"Chesterton once said of Shaw that there were some who understood him but did not like him There were others who liked him but did not understand him He alone both liked and understood him I also can say that I both like and understand Munshi —though more often than not I do not agree with him But life would be a very dull thing if all agreed with one another And how would so versatile and dynamic a personality as Munshi fit in?"

PART III

Munshi in Life and Literature

1

MUNSHIS IN LIFE AND LITERATURE

I have known Kanaiyalal Munshi for over a quarter of a century I cannot now recall how I came to know him Perhaps there is something in the old-world theory about people coming into each other's lives as the result of past associations However that may be, I, who left Gujarat before I was seventeen and spent almost thirty years of my life away from Gujarat, have been in intimate contact with a singularly attractive, genial and dynamic personality—always brimming over with laughter and bursting with energy and the making of plans and schemes often grandiose—which came to him almost as a matter of second nature Munshi was born in 1887 in what is now a rather sleepy hollow—Broach—the headquarters of a somewhat unattractive district, a decaying town which was once a prosperous port Munshi, despite his claim to be modern, cannot shake off the memories of his Brahman ancestry, or the pride of his ancestors, whose principal claim to distinction appears to have been their misplaced arrogance and infinite capacity for family feuds As a matter of fact, but for Munshi, it would not be necessary to mention them at all It is curious how the traditions of an ancient society and in many respects of an anachronistic past continue to dominate the life of a good many of us despite revolutionary changes sweeping over the entire world, including a relatively stagnant society such as ours It is perhaps the inevitable penalty of having a past!

The idea of a motherland has something elemental about it for it continues to haunt the sub-conscious corridors of a literary and artistic mind The country and its language and their countless associations weave spells of

dreams and impel men to sacrifice their everything in the service of the motherland Despite its cultural integrity, India is a land of wide dimensions and vast distances and the strength and weaknesses of its provincial characteristics have been noted and commented upon from the earliest times Gujarati provincialism appears to have been a relatively ancient phenomenon and the march of the centuries seems to have developed a pride, not only in the past, but a confidence in the near future Despite the enormous self-confidence and commendable enterprise of the modern Gujarati in the domain of non-violent politics and acquisitive economy, his output in the realm of imaginative art and creative literature has been neither brilliant nor profound, though it is true that the last twenty-five years have witnessed a cultural revival, which few, knowing the limitations and rather specialized pursuits and the strictly practical viewpoint of the Gujaratis, would have ventured to predict

Kanaiyalal Munshi is perhaps the first of the modern authors of Gujarat—modern in the sense that culturally he was as a child profoundly influenced by the teachings of the west—who was not afraid to incoporate in his life the influences from the outside world—literary and otherwise—that he thought significant He was not ashamed to acknowledge his indebtedness to the west, nor did he suffer from an inferiority complex about his own culture or the great traditions of his country Born in an orthodox family, brought up in the backwaters of a sleepy town, he had the advantage of growing up amidst an old-world order of superstitions, traditions, and vanities, with an attitude of sanctimonious complacency towards the past It was a world of dreams albeit limited, in respect of actual social environment, but with the advantage of being rooted in a congenial soil There were not many thrills

in the social life of orthodox India fifty years ago It was a pattern which had been set and was looking shabby with the passage of time However, it kept the social fabric together and fostered a spirit of contentment and steady behaviour Petty jealousies, meaningless intrigues, slanderous gossip about the doings of one another in small social groups were the only diversions possible in that atmosphere, particularly for women and the aged of either sex This suffocating inertia was made tolerable only by the recurrence of periodical festivals and the religious colouring of the life of the people There was always the consolation of the other world, though there was but little scope for any enterprise, or possible change in the present one The stream of life had reached a level where it was not capable of dancing and leaping from stone to stone, from crag to crag, tumbling down in a lusty torrent into the valleys below and coursing to its ultimate destiny

It was in such atmosphere that young Munshi dreamt dreams of his Bhargava ancestry of the legendary Parashurama, who had exterminated all the Kshatriyas in the universe He had his visions of love, of a partner in life, who would share his urge for beauty, who, besides being a comrade in all his literary pursuits, would appreciate his flights of imagination, support them, and even inspire the radiant vision, which he wanted to see and feel Outwardly life was no different for him than for any others of middle-class family in Gujarat, or almost anywhere in semi-urban India He had, however, one supreme advantage, which not many are fortunate enough to have, and that was of having a mother of exceptional understanding and of amazing sympathy and insight into the workings of a growing adolescent mind At every stage in Munshi's life his mother stood behind him as the one pillar on which he could always lean for strength and support

Women of this kind have been responsible for moulding the lives of many a great man in this country, for even amidst the very circumscribed limits of their vision, and the very narrow range of their lives, they felt by instinct the impact of new forces which would affect the lives and thoughts of their children They themselves were orthodox, but they had the necessary resilience and flexibility of character to be completely heterodox and practical in their outlook so far as the lives of their children were concerned

Munshi has expressed his indebtedness to his mother eloquently and frequently, and I must not omit to give a brief picture of this remarkable woman

Munshi's father was a Deputy Collector, an important official fifty years ago But he died young, somewhere near 1908, and did not leave much for his dependants It was left to Munshi's mother to maintain the standards of family prestige and to defray the expenses of educating a delicate child and his sisters She was, however, a woman of the old type combining austerity and toughness with a singular understanding of the changing requirements of the new generation She died in 1936 at the age of eighty-two, having had the good fortune to see her delicate son ripen into distinguished and affluent manhood Despite her orthodox birth she was the first to realise the deep-seated aspirations of her only son and to agree to his second marriage outside the social conventions with what was then an unusual degree of moral courage But Indian women have been remarkable for their responsiveness to circumstances without allowing their moral fibre to be weakened

Munshi was a voracious reader He had been nurtured on the myths and legends of the *puranas* Those were the days when for a pittance itinerant pandits educated the masses by reciting day after day for weeks on end, the

tales from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, thus keeping crowds of people of all ages fascinated and awake till the early hours of the morning. They projected the vision of an India that was, pointed out the moral, and gave guidance to those who had the power within them to emulate the great heroes of the past. Munshi naturally conceived himself as a hero, patterned on the ancient models, who would in due course conquer the universe by sheer grit and enterprise.

When he came to read English, Munshi was naturally thrilled with the tales of Dumas, Victor Hugo, Marie Corelli and other Western writers of fiction. There was one thing about this foreign fiction which fascinated Munshi's generation and that was the capacity to tell a story. There were Indian stories, but in most cases they were long-winded and overloaded with rhetoric and moral injunctions. The old-world legends and myths had begun to pall, they had become stale and had but little relation to the realities and problems of modern life. Above all, they did not make much allowance for the natural urge for enterprise and romance. Life was cast in rigid moulds of conventional morality or love-making. Munshi's future career as a writer of fiction was, therefore, dominated by the brilliance of European fiction and it would be false to underestimate the debt that he owes to the Western masters for his considerable success in telling a tale directly, vividly and tersely. He never indulges in mere padding or ornate verbosity, a besetting sin of most Indian romances. He pursues the narrative to its logical conclusion in a style at once forceful, simple and vibrant. The types of characters that he chose as the *dramatis personae* of his novels were only in part inspired by Western prototypes, firstly because Munshi himself was a thorough-bred Brahman of the orthodox variety and secondly be-

cause he was too ignorant of the Western modes of living to model his characters with anything but Indian clay. The characters that he chose and dramatised were really the creatures of the imagination of a man whose whole life was moulded by converging currents of different civilisations, but whose roots were strongly planted in the soil of his country's traditions

Munshi has been anything but reticent about himself In 1930, while in the Nasik gaol, he wrote a remarkable book within about ten days This was *Shishu ane Sakhī* (Child and Comrade) It is written in an unusual style, but perhaps for that very reason is suited to the intimate and biographical revelations of a mind richly endowed, sensitive in the extreme, given to moods of elation and depression Munshi traces in brief the development of his own mind and his romantic marriage, in poetically worded paragraphs which are perhaps unique in Gujarati literature, in the sense that they portray the lights and shadows of his intimate life candidly and with little reserve There are some passages which are cruel, where Munshi, for instance, describes his emotions at being married to a tiny uneducated girl of twelve This little bride was completely uneducated and naturally insensible to the tones and colours of a sophisticated life Her parents had neglected to impart any kind of elegance to this little child, whose entire universe centred in her husband and his welfare, whose intellectual range embraced but the gossip of the household and whose interests were limited to the affairs of a humdrum middle-class family The shock of this orthodox marriage to a youth of Munshi's sensibility was profound He even contemplated suicide as a possible means of escape, for such a chasm between the mate of his dreams and the actual partner given to him by social convention could not be bridged This disparity was and is

nothing unusual in Indian life, but Kanaiyalal Munshi was not Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi Munshi was a romantic, keenly sensible to sensuous appeals, one who loved to roam in regions of fancy and to delight in attempting to seize the beauties of his imagination in an actual and concrete world Time is a great healer, and the young girl-bride came to be an integral part of Munshi's household True, she never became the idol of his heart But idols are not always stable, nor perhaps significant from a strictly biological standpoint In any case, the child developed into a happy and dignified woman, who shared in the earlier struggles of her husband and tasted the joys of his rapid rise from comparative poverty to the comfortable life of a prosperous lawyer, distinguished writer and eloquent speaker Then she had also become a mother, and as Munshi expresses it in an eloquent passage, a little fairy had been born, who constituted a golden link between these two such disparate entities Munshi had also grown His romanticism had been tempered by the lapse of time, and also by the fact that his desires, dreams and ambitions had been partially sublimated and expressed through the medium of literature Literature is a great anodyne!

A woman of remarkable personality, unhappy in her first marriage, suddenly appears on the stage of Munshi's life, first as a literary co-worker, and later as a dear friend and his life's chosen mate and wife But this is a part of Munshi's life, which he himself has recounted frankly and eloquently, and I have no desire to go into the emotional strain and the struggle through which Munshi passed and about which he has expressed himself in burning words nor do I propose to deal at length with the distinguished career which Kanaiyalal and Lilavati Munshi together built up, not only in literature, but in the public life of the country It would, however, be appropriate to say

here a few words regarding the women of Gujarat The Gujarati woman has enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than women in other parts of India Having her being amidst a highly practical people, whose values are in terms of material goods, the woman of Gujarat has developed certain distinctive characteristics Simple, matter-of-fact, sentimental and sensuous, despite the conventional veil of indifference to the pleasures of the senses, she has played and continues to play an enormously important part in the life of Gujarat, whether in the home or in the field of social service or of politics She is the pivot round which the world of Gujarat really moves, her contentment, her pleasures and her sorrows are immensely important for the social harmony of the home Nowhere in India has the woman played such a role, quietly and with such confidence, as the woman in Gujarat Despite her handicaps, common to all women in India, she has taken her place alongside her menfolk as a matter of right and enriched the social and public life of Gujarat and, in a sense, of India as a whole, in an exceptional measure It is curious that these provincial characteristics should have been noted, and commented upon by ancient writers, and judging from present experience their judgement was on the whole sound The Gujarati woman has not the exquisite simplicity and accomplishments of the woman in the South, particularly from Malabar, she has not the binding smartness of bearing of the beautifully-shaped daughters of the Punjab, or of Kashmir, nor has she the calm austerity of the demure damsels from Maharashtra, or the dreamy grace of the Bengali woman Like the daughters of Rajputana, the woman in Gujarat is simple but gay, sentimental rather than subtle or poetic, deeply sensitive to colours and the rhythm of movement, eminently practical, with enormous powers to suffer adverse tides of fortune The Gujarati

women have a habit of keeping their form and feminity till late in life They have a genius for quiet withdrawal from the wordly stage with the advent of old age and being content to exercise their influence from behind the scenes, it is therefore all the more powerful and felt than if it were open and explicit

It is not an accident that Kasturba Gandhi has been acclaimed as representing the highest ideal of Indian womanhood, nor is this apotheosis of Kasturba wholly on account of her association with the great Mahatma, for I know that she, like countless mothers in Gujarat, was a noble and representative type such as has brightened the homes of Gujarat and spiritualised them for centuries The Gujarati man has invariably been sentimental He has sighed and longed for the mate of his dreams, for the traditions of good and beautiful Gujarati women continue to fire his imagination and to inspire him to high enterprises and to the winning of the worldly goods so necessary for the happiness of a practical people

Munshi, who shed tears and even contemplated suicide, has been, like a hero of melodrama, singularly fortunate in having won his heart's desire, and in having found in his second venture the woman of his dreams to share his home and happiness As a result, he is in a mood of elation and acknowledges his debt to his wife in generous terms But what he has failed to do is to admit the fact that Lilavati Munshi, a distinguished stylist and a writer of powerful prose, with an unusual eye for character and a pen dipped in biting sarcasm, was obliged, after she became installed as the presiding deity of the Munshi household, to immolate herself in respect of her literary career Two streams of literary activity, which had been significant and separate, became merged together and the only entity left, at least in matters literary, was Kanaiyalal Munshi himself

Lilavati Munshi, despite Munshi's wrapping her up in a mantle of high romantic beauty, is a singularly efficient little lady with feet firmly planted on the earth, vibrant, matter-of-fact, efficient and an accomplished housewife She is, like her husband, ambitious and has considerable organizing capacity But despite Munshi's romantic temperament, it would be a mistake to class either of the Munshis as ethereal beings moving at altitudes of a rarefied atmosphere Munshi was born a Brahman, with plenty of pride, but little in the way of possessions, while Lilavati was brought up in the lap of comfort and in an environment which set store on wealth rather than on learning or ideals Both began their life amidst uncongenial surroundings, and it was good that these two should have been brought together through the medium of literature Their partnership has been exceptionally happy, particularly from the point of view of Gujarati art and literature and of the public life in Bombay After her marriage, however, Lilavati Munshi's literary pursuits suffered a complete eclipse Her energies were diverted henceforward towards civic life and with her energy, tact and commonsense she moved in every phase of the busy life of Bombay with ease and confidence The poetic element which had in her earlier years expressed itself as an urge for travelling, largely as an escape from a conventional and therefore miserable existence, became sublimated into something more significant, causing her to concentrate on developing the beautiful crafts of Gujarat and on reviving that innate sense of rhythm and dance, which, from time immemorial, has been the proud possession of the Gujarati woman Meanwhile, Lilavati Munshi, despite her activities on the civic stage of Municipal politics and of the provincial legislature, became the fostering spirit of Munshi the

indefatigable, Munshi the brilliant lawyer and Munshi the restless and ambitious organiser and politician

It is a pity, nevertheless, that Lilavati Munshi has practically ceased writing, for she is an accomplished author with a style of her own, a gift for focussing attention on social problems and with a psychological insight into the difficulties of Indian life which few Gujarati writers of the present generation possess In her volume of short stories—*Jivanmanthi Jadeli*—(Stories from Life) —collected in 1932, she has handled a variety of themes with considerable verve and given us a mordant interpretation of the social iniquities and particularly that of the sad lot of woman in Indian society Her main theme is the freeing of her sex from an existing tyranny so accentuated and so completely accepted as to be almost a law of nature, but that is simply due to the economic serfdom of the Indian woman Traditions have had a great deal to do with the Indian woman's own attitude towards her various disabilities, and these latter never fail to attract the acute observation and the acid comments of one who has herself gone through the whole gamut of a woman's handicaps in Indian life Occasionally she relents and produces a little masterpiece in which her woman's heart throbs with elemental love for the child and for the husband. The story of the lonely Sadhuram reveals with considerable insight and tenderness the theme of a lonely man battling against upsurging emotions which are aroused and defeated by the inexorable ebb and flow of love Lilavati Munshi here forgets her grievances against mere man, and finds that life, despite all its tragic conflicts, is based on a relatively simple pattern of emotions She never ceases to be a realist, for she, shrewd woman that she is, understands the implications of actions which sometimes have unforeseen results Nowhere has she brought these out as

vividly as in the short play that she has written dealing with the Gandhian movement Gandhism has had enormous influence outside the political sphere it has affected and partially moulded, though in the long run not quite so radically as one would have expected, the shape of Hindu life and ideology Both Lilavati Munshi and her husband have been greatly affected by the personal influence of Gandhiji himself and by his philosophy

Lilavati Munshi has written other plays also Here again, in *Kumaradevi* she portrays the famous Gupta empress as a woman of outstanding character—a woman who was in fact the dominant partner in the life of Chandra Gupta I The play is remarkable not so much for its dramatic quality as for an ambitious attempt to portray the story of a great character—powerful, dynamic, ruthless, and yet feminine from the galaxy of India's historic personalities Lilavati Munshi must sometimes have seen the visions of Kumaradevi, who never forgot to describe herself, not only as the queen of Chandra Gupta, but also as a daughter of the proud and famous Lichchhavi clan Lilavati Munshi writes well, she employs a homely style, direct, sometimes whimsical, always observant and usually devoid of rhetoric She is primarily interested in dissecting human motives and observing men and women at a deeper level than that at which they appear to the outside world In this respect she differs from her husband, Kanaiyalal Munshi, whose method is quite otherwise

Munshi has written a considerable amount of fiction, both historical and social, but he is not an archaeologist, nor a scholar, nor a professional historian He is primarily an imaginative writer, who views India's past with the glowing eyes of a poet He is also a keen politician and journalist and is therefore unable to shake off the influence of current events from his writings For this reason too

there is, a certain element of anachronism in the manner in which his various characters behave It is perhaps impossible for a writer to forget his environment and to project himself so completely into the past, as to ignore his personal predilections and his general ideology Munshi has never tired of talking of India's integrity, and, in essence, the stand that he has taken is not only historically correct but also vital from the viewpoint of the interests of the world as a whole While it is not necessary to discuss the question in a discourse of this nature, it is essential to emphasise Munshi's attachment to the uniqueness of his country's civilization, with its unchallenged and dynamic continuity He has often taken his characters from the remote past of the Vedas and he is particularly proud of what he considers to be his important contribution in interpreting the golden age of India But if prediction has any relevance in a matter of this kind, I should imagine that the books dealing with some of the forgotten characters of the Vedic civilisation will remain more as a testimony to the orthodox background from which Munshi derived his literary inspirations than to their general and intrinsic appeal The reason is not a lack of literary merit the root cause is somewhat deeper India is passing through one of the great epochal changes of history in which the tempo of social and political changes is so rapid that it is almost impossible to see even an outline of the shape of things to come All that one can say is that the gods of the Vedas and even of the more recent mythology have virtually ceased to be Even India, with her long and continuous tradition, is more inclined to look forward than backwards and the rising generation is more interested in solving the mundane and concrete problems of life than in recalling the memories of a past, however brilliant its hues may have been, simply because that past does not matter

or has but little significance in moulding the life of the future

Munshi has devoted several years of his life to writing the drama of India's past, his latest creation in this direction being an ambitious volume entitled *Parashuram* Munshi has felt that Aryan culture has in it something living and that it will continue to live in the untold generations of Indians hereafter He has therefore taken enormous pains to bring to life mythical or legendary characters who throw into relief the achievements of a bygone age The result has not been altogether commensurate with the expenditure of labour and energy spent on it It is astonishing that Munshi has found so much time and energy to devote to literature when he has occupied a pre-eminent position as a busy lawyer, an active journalist and a shrewd politician But it is this very dispersion of energy which has no doubt affected the finish of his work and concentration and also the development of a mature, precise and inspiring manner of writing Munshi is rarely interested in laying bare the deeper currents of human psychology His canvas and range are somewhat limited, and the limitations are perhaps both the result of his mental make-up as well as of those of modern India Munshi may be considered as a representative medium of the many cross-currents of India's intellectual make-up, a mixture of the ancient and the modern, a mixture of the scientific and the supersititious and a curious amalgam of idealism and the spirit of compromise

Despite Munshi's pre-occupation for many years with India's distant past, he has been extraordinarily sensible to the charms of medieval Gujarat, which threw up a galaxy of individuals immortalised in the pages of his many romances

Personages who were thought of hitherto as minor

characters have been moulded into heroic proportions and transformed into characters, gay, elegant, strong and altogether free and modern in their outlook Some of these individuals portray Munshi's own moods, for Munshi is a person who lives in a world of his own He never forgets to occupy the central place in the drama of his mental life The result has been a series of striking men and women, who charm us with their idealism, with the conflict of their emotions and with their passionate love of existence One has only to mention such figures as Munjal and Minal Devi, as Kak and Manjari, to see that the history of Gujarat, has, for the first time, through the medium of men and women who would do credit to any country and who, above all, have furnished the patterns of dreams and behaviour for the younger generation of to-day, been made into something living Munshi is not greatly troubled by the minutiae of historical accuracy, he is chiefly interested in depicting the types of humanity whom he has seen, whether in actual life, or only in his dreams He is a curious mixture of the idealist and the practical man of affairs, one who swears by the Mahatma, yet is ambitious and active and engaged in many activities where life has not always to be lived in an atmosphere of rigid idealism or an uncompromising attitude to human foibles Munshi himself has passed through a variety of experience, has practised *hatha-yoga* has experienced visions, has more than toyed with the calling up of spirits and the reading of the past and future by soothsayers of all kinds He has, in short, tasted life at diverse springs and what he has never lacked is a smile or a capacity for viewing the resulting vicissitudes in their rosier and brighter aspects Such of his characters as Manjari and Kak and Minal Devi and Munjal, reflect Munshi's own outlook on life They are never depressed or overwhelmed by circumstances It is

natural to them to ride the storms of life in all the phases, political, emotional, or of any other kind Munshi is never daunted by mere convention, or by the canons of formal respectability Throughout his career he has felt that the greatest handicaps of Indian society have been its lip-service to principles in the abstract and its infinite tolerance of practices widely or and wholly divergent from theory His writings reveal, at every stage, therefore, a spirit of revolt, where the full-blooded life of the individual comes into conflict with the rules of conventional morality or social propriety Indian life has been ground down to a level of deadly uniformity, where every vital and daring emotion is either suppressed or frowned upon Individual freedom has been denied to all except the very powerful or the most exceptional, with the result that not only has social life been cramped and deprived of its savour, but that the literature of the people has suffered and been canalised into something which has no relation to reality, and that has sought refuge either in a meaningless jugglery with words, or of profane and highly-coloured versions of a life attributable to the Divine The monotony, as well as the limited thematic range of most of our Indian literature since the eleventh century, are wholly due to the kind of life that has been lived by the people for literature is but a mirror of people's heart and mind

Munshi's golden age of Gujarat ranged from the ninth to the twelfth century and he has devoted ten of his romances to the glory that was Gujarat Each of these works centres in Gujarat and its varied cultural life, with its wealth, its domestic politics and its incessant intrigues and squabbles with the neighbouring States Munshi wends his way through this complicated tangle with the sure touch of a born politician and diplomatist, and what

had hitherto remained merely as the life of a provincial court, suddenly becomes a dazzling stage with glittering figures striding across it Munshi is a born raconteur, he makes use of petty intrigues as a vital element in the development of his main narrative and in unfolding the traits of his principal characters As a matter of fact, the greatest contribution that Munshi has made to the literature of Gujarat lies in his exceptional capacity to tell a story effectively, to the point and with an unusual gusto in putting the various personages of his tales, as it were, on the screen His stories move swiftly, unimpeded by long-winded descriptions either of the past or of ancillary circumstances, nor are they couched in the pedantic sentences which were the stock-in-trade of most of his predecessors, and in this connection, it would perhaps be well to say a few words about Munshi's manner of writing

The prose literature of most Indian languages are of recent origin and almost all of them date from the first quarter of the nineteenth century Their prose style was modelled on that of classical Sanskrit romances and was generally heavy and ornate and overloaded with Sanskritic words The result was that the story itself would be lost, or would maintain only an attenuated thread through the maze of conventional descriptions which might be reminiscent of the Sanskrit *mahakavyas*, but were hardly germane to the swift flow of modern fiction

Munshi may be regarded as the first important writer of modern fiction in Gujarati Almost before the advent of the movies, he wrote novels where the various characters flitted across the scene with the rapidity and precision of a modern film His language, is the very reverse of the studied pedantry and high falutin of his predecessors His sentences are short and charged with the vitality of

a living tongue It is not as if Munshi could not spin out an occasional sentence of exquisite beauty and of great descriptive power, but he is far too much interested in the doings of his characters and in working up the events which furnish the background to his romances, to pay much heed to the descriptive padding, which has been for centuries the traditional pattern of prose-writing in this country

Munshi's position in the literature of Gujarat is in fact assured He has not only been a successful novelist, dramatist, historian, essayist, educationist, journalist, politician, speaker and lawyer, but his literary output has been considerable and there is hardly a phase of letters at which he has not tried his hand and at which he has not distinguished himself Curiously enough, he has never written any poetry, though the writing of verse on every kind of subject is a common accomplishment amongst the *literati* of India His mind has perhaps been too concrete to enable his Muse to soar, but it has undoubtedly helped him to concentrate on his immediate objective He has been able to switch from one activity to another with astonishing ease and his versatility and varied range of interests have not therefore, seriously affected the quality of his work He is always able to laugh and though he is now (1947) over sixty he is astonishingly young for his age This keen and unfailing sense of humour of his may sometimes have the effect of exposing the pretension behind the facade of sanctimonious humbug so dear to an old and conventional society, but his abiding contributions lie in his romances of medieval Gujarat, his passionate pleas for the oneness of his country and of its literature, his brilliant essays on Narsinha Mehta and some of his shorter plays, in which he lays bare many of the cracks in our social fabric

He has led a rich life of creative activity, of social distinction and of practical success and I imagine that just as in the past he has been one of the formative factors in the renaissance of modern Gujarat, so will he continue, by reason of his passionate devotion to its unity and his faith in the future of its literature, to make important contributions to its progress

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